COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

DOUBLE ISSUE!

Sports Illustrated KIDS

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2016 Summer Olympics Preview

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Clemson has the country's best team and its best player: quarterback **DESHAUN WATSON**

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LINEUP

AUGUST 2016
VOLUME 28
NUMBER 7

Photograph by
ROBERT BECK

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

28 DESHAUN WATSON After leading Clemson to an undefeated regular season and a College Football Playoff berth, the dual-threat QB is ready to do it all over again. This time, however, he's not leaving without a title.

32 THE TOP 20 These teams are loaded with Heisman-caliber talent. Which schools will compete for the national championship in January?

36 FIVE MINUTE GUIDE From key matchups and rising sons to coaching characters and silly superstitions, get the scoop on the story lines you need to follow this season.

38 REMEMBER WHEN? The NFL's top players used their college years to propel themselves toward professional stardom.

LINEUP

18 PRIME TIME
This year's youngest draft pick, Dragan Bender of Croatia, will try to grow his game in the NBA.

42 CLEVELAND'S PAIN
LeBron James brought home the city's first major pro championship since 1964. A look back at the 52-year drought.

44 MUHAMMAD ALI
The greatest boxer of all time passed away in June. He made a huge impact in the ring and out of it.

46 MONICA ABBOTT
This record-setting flamethrower was the first woman in U.S. team sports to sign a $1 million contract.

48 ROLLER COASTERS
Riders are experiencing thrills on the new dive coaster.

50 BACK TO SCHOOL
Want to work in sports? We've got the jobs for you and the tools to get you there.

52 HOCKEY MASKS
You sent us your best goalie helmet designs. We'd like to see some in the crease.

54 BOOK EXCERPT
These 10 sackmasters ruled NFL backfields, inspiring fear in quarterbacks.

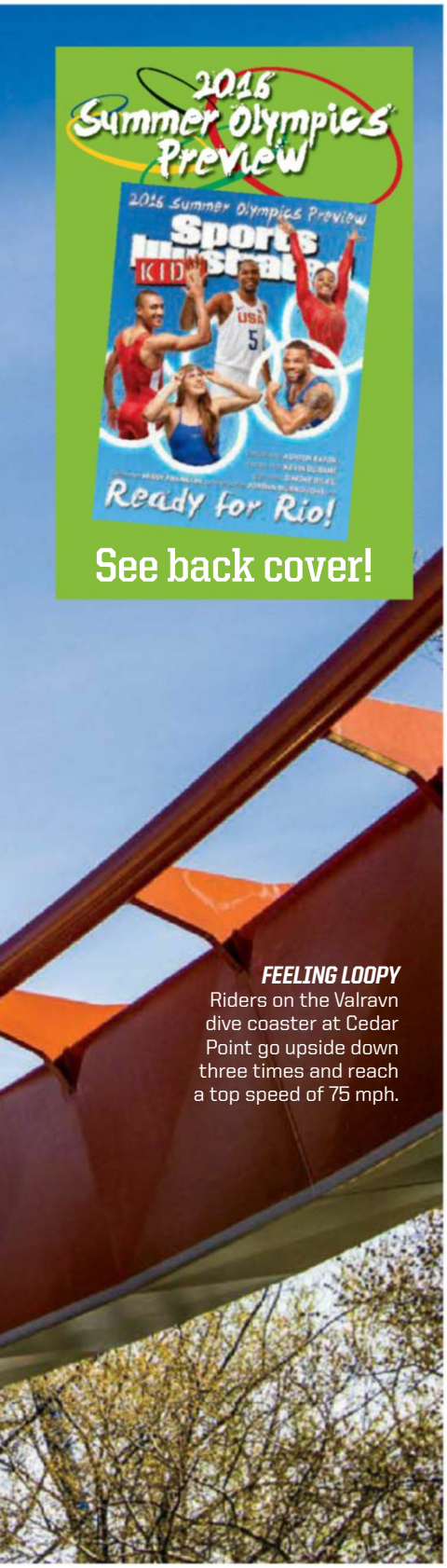
FROM THE PAGES OF *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED*

58 UNDISCOVERED MODEL
Bullpens remain baseball's greatest mystery. Why is it still so hard to assemble a reliable group of relievers?

FAVORITES

4 Freeze Frame
9 Sports Cards
13 August Birthdays
14 Future Stars
17 LOL
22 Posters
62 What's the Call?
63 Games
64 Art Gallery
65 Comic Cards
66 Buzz Beamer

COVER
Bill Frakes
Photo Composition by SI Premedia



FEELING LOOPY
Riders on the Valravn dive coaster at Cedar Point go upside down three times and reach a top speed of 75 mph.

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FREEZE FRAME

BULL'S-EYE

June 12, 2016 • Milwaukee, Wisconsin

This pitch from Zach Davies of the Brewers only looked like it was headed for the space between the arms of Mets slugger Yoenis Cespedes. Davies got Cespedes to line out in this at bat, which was a common result. In six innings, Davies allowed just three hits and Milwaukee won 5–3.

Photograph by
MIKE MCGINNIS/GETTY IMAGES

FREEZE FRAME

SPLISH SPLASH

June 22, 2016 • Chicago, Illinois

Francisco Silva of Chile ended up all wet as he battled for the ball with Colombia's Roger Martinez during their Copa América semifinal match. The game was delayed more than two hours by bad weather. When it finally ended, Chile had a 2-0 victory and a spot in the final against Argentina.

Photograph by
NICHOLAS KAMM/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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WARMUP

AMATEUR HOUR
Jake Arrieta, who pitched in the 2008 Games, is just one of many future aces to play for Team USA as a minor leaguer.

BURNING QUESTION

SHOULD BASEBALL BE IN THE OLYMPICS?

BY MARK BECHTEL

Photograph by
Clive Rose/Getty Images

WHEN THE SUMMER OLYMPIC Games open this month in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, more than 10,000 athletes will compete in dozens of sports. One sport that is noticeably missing is baseball.

Baseball and softball were dropped in 2005. Softball was ousted because the United States had been too dominant. In the '04 Games, the U.S. outscored its opponents 51–1. (Ironically, the U.S. lost the gold medal game in '08, the last time it was part of the Olympic program.)

Baseball was a different case. Even

though the sport is America's national pastime, the U.S. didn't dominate at the Olympics. But Major League Baseball wasn't about to suspend its season for two weeks while its best players took part in the tournament. That lack of star power was the primary reason baseball was eliminated.

There was a bit of an uproar, even though it's not unprecedented for the event lineup to change. The Olympics have seen plenty of sports come and go. In the early years, there was a competition in which marksmen shot at deer-shaped moving targets. The tug of war was contested at six Games. (How cool would it be if it were brought back? But that's another Burning Question.) And until the 1940s, the Olympics also featured art competitions. In 1912, Walter Winans of the U.S. won silver in sharpshooting as well as gold in sculpture.

The outrage worked. Starting in 2020, both softball and baseball are expected to again be included in the Games. (Other new sports include surfing and skateboarding.)

Is that a good thing? In the case of softball, definitely. Plenty of sports are dominated by one country; that's no reason to stop playing it. In fact, the added exposure might make other ountries more interested in softball — and eventually better at it.

Baseball will face the same problems it did during its first run. Teams will be made up of amateurs and minor leaguers. But that's not necessarily a bad thing. The U.S. roster in 2008 included Jake Arrieta (then a farmhand) and Stephen Strasburg (a college player), who are now two of the best pitchers in baseball.

There was a time when no professionals competed in the Olympics. That's changed, leading to the era of basketball's Dream Teams and hockey in the Winter Games that features the biggest names in the world. (The NHL has instituted a break during Olympic years.)

The Olympics should be about inclusion — not only of new sports, but also of traditional favorites. And while, sure, it would be nice to see the Cy Young Award winners of today competing, there's nothing wrong with watching the Cy Young winners of tomorrow.

NO SOFTIES After helping the U.S. win its third straight gold medal in 2004, Jennie Finch was on the team that finally lost, in '08 to Japan.

AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES (FINCH)

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THIS MONTH

SOUTHPAW CENTRAL

National Lefthanders Day is the 13th. What will these lefties be up to in August?

International Soccer

August 3, FC Barcelona vs. Leicester

The greatest player in the game came up short in the Copa América in June. So it's back to focusing on club play for **Lionel Messi**. He will lead La Liga winners FC Barcelona against Premier League darlings Leicester City in the International Champions Cup, a series of matches around the world.

NBA

Last summer was an eventful one for the Clippers' **DeAndre Jordan.** He was in high demand as a free agent, and he announced he was going to sign with Dallas. His Clippers teammates weren't ready to see him go, and... You remember the rest. This August, Jordan will be in Brazil with the U.S. Olympic team. We suspect he'll be too busy to engage in any Twitter emoji battles.

Olympics

August 5–21
Rio Olympics

Fourteen-time Grand Slam champion **Rafael Nadal** of Spain will try for a second gold.

MLB

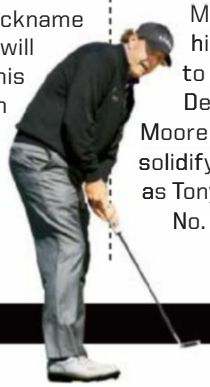
August 23–25
Giants vs. Dodgers

Three-time Cy Young Award winner Clayton Kershaw will go against division rival San Francisco and fellow southpaw Madison Bumgarner.

PGA Tour

August 25–28
The Barclays

Phil Mickelson, the five-time major winner whose nickname is Lefty, will stop at this tourney in New York.



NFL

July 30–August 18
Cowboys training camp

Third-string Dallas QB Kellen Moore got his chance to start last December. Moore will try to solidify his spot as Tony Romo's No. 2 guy.

AUGUST BIRTHDAYS

2 New York Knicks power forward **Kristaps Porzingis** turns 21.

4 ▶ USWNT and Sky Blue FC defender **Kelley O'Hara** celebrates her 28th birthday.

7 Free safety **Tashaun Gipson** of the Jacksonville Jaguars turns 26.

8 Seventeen-time tennis Grand Slam winner **Roger Federer** of Switzerland is 35.

13 ▶ Calgary Flames leftwinger **Johnny Gaudreau** celebrates his 23rd birthday.

14 Nashville Predators defenseman **Shea Weber** turns 31.

17 ▶ Boston Red Sox second baseman **Dustin Pedroia** is 33.

18 Sacramento Kings center **Willie Cauley-Stein** celebrates his 23rd birthday.

21 Eleven-time world champion sprinter **Usain Bolt** of Jamaica is 30.

22 ▶ Wide receiver **Randall Cobb** of the Green Bay Packers turns 26.

25 Tampa Bay Rays first baseman **Logan Morrison** is 29.

26 ▶ Houston Rockets shooting guard **James Harden** celebrates his 27th birthday.

ALEX CAPARROS/GETTY IMAGES (MESSI); ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (JORDAN); MICHAEL STEELE/GETTY IMAGES (NADAL); KOHJIRO KINNO (MICKELSON); RICH BARNES/GETTY IMAGES (O'HARA); KIRK IRWIN/GETTY IMAGES (GAUDREAU); MICHAEL IVINS/BOSTON RED SOX/GETTY IMAGES (PEDROIA); LACHLAN CUNNINGHAM/GETTY IMAGES (COBB); BILL BAPTIST/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (HARDEN)

ON OUR RADAR

TARA VITTESE

HEIGHT: 5'10"
BIRTHPLACE: PHILADELPHIA, PA
BIRTH DATE: OCTOBER 22, 1995
SPORT: FIELD HOCKEY

- Tara was named the 2015 Longstreth/NFHCA National Player of the Year last December. She is the first University of Virginia Cavalier to earn the honor. The midfielder is also a first-team All-America and first team All-ACC honoree for the second consecutive year.
- During the 2015 season, Tara scored three game-winning goals, including a penalty stroke in overtime against Delaware, helping UVA earn the No. 3 national seed in the NCAA tournament.
- Tara led the Cavaliers with team highs in points (39) and goals (15) last season. She also ranked second in assists (nine). Entering her junior year, the 20-year-old is two assists and 15 points from cracking the program's top 10 lists. She has 32 career goals so far.
- At the 2016 Junior Pan American Championship in March, Tara won a silver medal with the U.S. U21 team, netting three goals during the tournament.

SPORTSKIDS OF THE MONTH

EASTON BAGDON, 8

Grand Prairie, TX
ICE HOCKEY

Easton scored two hat tricks for the Arlington Ice Bandits in the first game of the Dallas Stars Top Shelf Tournament in February. The center finished with 16 goals in four tournament games.

BRYCEN DANNER, 12

Nezperce, ID
BASEBALL

In May, Brycen threw a no-hitter with 17 strikeouts in the first game of the Nezperce Cal Ripken league season. The sixth-grader also had two hits and one RBI in the Lugnuts' 3–0 victory.

GARRETT HENDERSON, 13

Medford, OR
TRACK & FIELD

Garrett sprang into the record book twice this year. In May, he shattered a 49-year-old long jump record at the SOMSAC district finals with a 19'2½" leap. Three weeks later, his 19'4" jump broke the Oregon Middle School Meet of Champions record.

ARE YOU A SPORTSKID?

If you think you have what it takes to be a SportsKid of the Month, submit your nomination at: **SIKIDS.com/SportsKid**

COURTESY OF MATT RILEY/UVA ATHLETICS

SHAPING UP

Tampa Bay Buccaneers center **JOE HAWLEY** finds peace off the field through ceramics.

As told to Charlie Broaddus

I STARTED POTTERY my junior year of high school after my friend said I should try a ceramics class. The teacher was really cool, just a go-with-the-flow kind of guy. He would pick one or two students every week to go on the pottery wheel, and when my turn came up, I was a natural. He let me stay on the wheel for the rest of the year, and eventually one of my pieces won third place in the school art contest. I'm pretty proud of that one.

I loved it so much I tried to take a ceramics class in college, but I could never get enrolled in one because it was always during football practice. Once I got drafted and finally got a little bit of money, I decided it would be a good time to buy my own wheel and get back into it.

I think you've got to have a creative, artistic edge — and some patience. Pottery teaches you to calm your mind and be patient, because if you aren't, the whole piece could fall apart. It gives me something to focus on to shut down the outside world and clear my head.

The coolest thing about it is you have an idea of what you want it to look like when you throw the clay down, but you have to let the clay work itself. If you work it too much, the piece will actually fall apart, so you're kind of restricted. You don't really know when you start what the finished product will look like — it's kind of a surprise.

I play football with a lot of passion, and I do get fired up out there, but off the field I'm a more laid-back guy. It's kind of two different guys. Making pottery helps me get rid of all the stresses in life. It's peaceful.

2016 Indianapolis 500 champion

ALEXANDER ROSSI'S FAVORITE THINGS

FOOD
Mexican food

ICE CREAM FLAVOR
Mint chocolate chip

CARTOON CHARACTERS
The Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote

SERIES AS A KID
The Hardy Boys

VIDEO GAME
Madden 2004

SUBJECTS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL
Tie between math and chemistry

SUPERHERO
Batman

ATHLETE AS A KID
Kobe Bryant

MOVIE AS A KID
Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey

ACTOR
Matt Damon

Interview by Ford Carlisle

JEFFERY SALTER (HAWLEY AT HOME, VASE); PHELAN M. EBENHACK/AP (HAWLEY ACTION); SARAH CRABILL/GETTY IMAGES FOR TEXAS MOTOR SPEEDWAY (ROSSI); RENEE COMET/STOCKFOOD/GETTY IMAGES (TACO); JAMES WORRELL/GETTY IMAGES (ICE CREAM); © WARNER BROS./EVERETT COLLECTION (BATMAN); WALT DISNEY PICTURES (MOVIE); JEFF VESPA/WIREIMAGE (DAMON)

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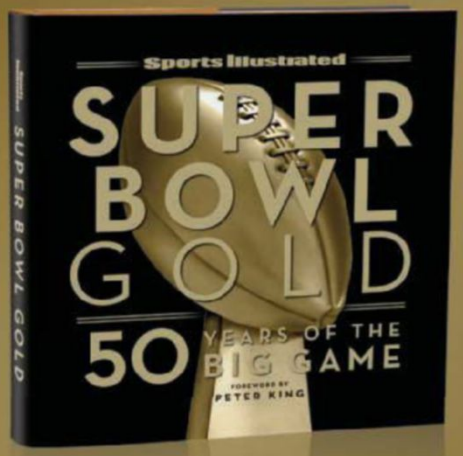

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LITTLE LEAGUE

BIG WINNER Frazier (center) was 4 for 4 in the 1998 final, a 12-9 victory over Japan.

FIELD OF DREAMS

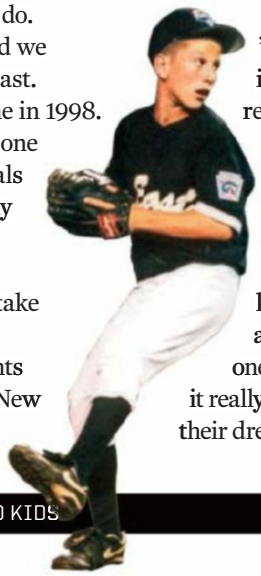
The Little League World Series is August 18-28. White Sox third baseman **TODD FRAZIER** relives the 1998 title. *As told to Kellen Becoats*

WHEN I WAS a kid, I played with my brothers and their friends. I went from being the last one picked to being the first. I had to step up my game and my level of competition.

My brother played in the 1995 Little League World Series, and I had two of my buddies with me at those games. I said, "Guys, this is where we want to be." We laughed at the time, but that's exactly what we wanted to do. Eventually we got there and we became the Beasts of the East.

I remember the last game in 1998. It was unbelievable. It was one of the most memorable finals because there were so many runs scored, and I was the winning pitcher. That's something they can never take away from me.

One of the cooler moments was when we met [former New York Yankees outfielder] Paul O'Neill before the game, which was a thrill to me because he was my idol. After the game, we met with the Yankees. I stood next to Derek Jeter; they put us together by our positions, and I also played shortstop. I got to meet one of the greatest players of all time, and I eventually met Jeter again in the 2014 All-Star game, my first and his last.



I think the best part of that '98 World Series was bringing it home to New Jersey. I represent where I'm from no matter what. I have a good fanbase at home, and I want kids there to strive to be better than I am one day.

You get to meet major leaguers and stand on the field and you're like, "Gosh, I hope one day this can be me." And then it really was. Not many people can say their dreams came true.

RUSTY KENNEDY (CELEBRATION); TOM SZCZERBOWSKI/GETTY IMAGES (FRAZIER WITH WHITE SOX); COURTESY OF LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL (PITCHING AS A KID)

Submit your caption at **SIKIDS.com/FunnyPhoto.** Your entry could appear in a future issue of the magazine.

FUNNY PHOTO

The winning caption from SIKIDS.com:

"CAN'T YOU SEE THAT I'M A CUBS FAN?!"

— A.J., 13, COLORADO

"You told me we were going to see the Philly Phanatic!"
– Dante, 13, Pennsylvania

"They let *this* guy through security?!"
– Kate, 11, California

"Take me to Wrigley Field. *Now*!"
– Marie, 12, New York

"First he's under my bed, and now he's following me around?"
– Annette, 7, Texas

"Take me away from the ball game; take me away from the crowd!"
– Carter, 11, Nebraska

"I cry watching the Sox too, kid."
– Sam, 9, Tennessee

SOUND OFF

What was your coolest celebrity moment?

My first OMG celebrity moment was when I met Shaquille O'Neal at a church event. He was there as a speaker. I was 20, but I felt like such a kid meeting someone I always looked up to in the game of basketball.
COURTNEY PARIS
Dallas Wings center

[Hockey Hall of Famer] Gordie Howe. I saw him during my days playing hockey. Some of my best memories are from playing other sports, not football, when I was a kid.
J.J. WATT
Houston Texans defensive end

The first time I saw Dwayne (The Rock) Johnson, when I was eight or nine years old. It was one of the biggest moments of my life. He was *the* guy. He had played at the University of Miami, and he also wrestled. I was attending a summer camp in Miami, and he spoke. He was encouraging us to stay active and exercise. I would love to meet the Rock. I'd probably put one of his wrestling moves on him.
COREY LIUGET
San Diego Chargers defensive end

JONATHAN DANIEL/GETTY IMAGES (FUNNY PHOTO); SCOTT HALLERAN/GETTY IMAGES (WATT); D. CLARKE EVANS/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (PARIS); PAUL SPINELLI/AP (LIUGET)

TEAM
Phoenix Suns

POSITION
Power Forward

SPOTLIGHT
This year's youngest NBA draft pick, a native of Croatia, is a graceful big man who will try to make a name for himself in the U.S. even as he still hones his game.

Dragan BENDER

BY LUKE WINN

On May 17, the evening the NBA draft lottery was held in New York City, two giant brothers were halfway around the world at the airport in Tel Aviv, Israel. They were waiting for their parents and two suitcases to come off a flight from Zagreb, Croatia. The brothers had obtained special permission to pass through security in order to help their folks navigate the airport. But the brothers were also deeply interested in the suitcases. "It's like we're waiting for some money or some treasure," the older one said.

The younger brother was Dragan Bender, an 18-year-old, 7' 1" stretch power forward. At the time, he was playing for Maccabi Tel Aviv, one of the most prominent teams in the Euroleague. The older brother was Ivan Bender, a 20-year-old,

READY FOR TAKEOFF
Bender, who played sparingly for Maccabi this season, is a smooth player with impressive shot-blocking instincts.

Photograph by
Thomas Coex/AFP/ Getty Images

6' 9" forward on summer break after his redshirt freshman season at Maryland.

The suitcases were normal in appearance, black and green, but they held cargo that isn't exactly common in Israel: a significant quantity of tasty pork products, vacuum-sealed in clear plastic. (Most of Israel's population is either Jewish or Muslim, members of two religions that have traditionally forbidden eating pigs.) The treats were homemade and included bacon, ham, and *pršut*, a thinly-sliced ham which — if done correctly — takes over a year to make.

In a way, Bender is like the *pršut* his family makes. He needs to properly age before he's a finished product. At 18 years and seven months, he was the youngest player picked in the lottery of the 2016 draft. (The Phoenix Suns took him fourth.) Scouts had few opportunities to watch Bender, which made it difficult for teams to know exactly what they were getting.

Bender averaged just 12.9 minutes for Maccabi this season, making just three starts. He also missed last summer's FIBA U19 World Championships. Bender's shoe sponsor is Adidas. But the Croatian national team is sponsored by Jordan Brand, which refused to let Bender play in his Adidas footwear. So he sat out the tournament.

The understandable predraft question hanging over Bender, then, was how someone who couldn't crack the starting lineup of an Israeli Super League team, and who hasn't appeared in a major international competition since 2014, could be a serious candidate to be taken in the lottery.

The answer begins with what's evident on the court: Bender is 7' 1" with a 7' 2" wingspan and can gracefully move on the perimeter as a pick-and-pop guy, a ballhandler, and an agile defender. He has a competent (but not deadeye) three-point shot. And he has an advanced feel around the basket, despite lacking the bulk to do damage in the NBA paint. While not a spectacular athlete, he is a smooth one. He has the potential to be the kind of big man that the league currently covets in this era of shooters. There was no other 7-footer like him in this draft.

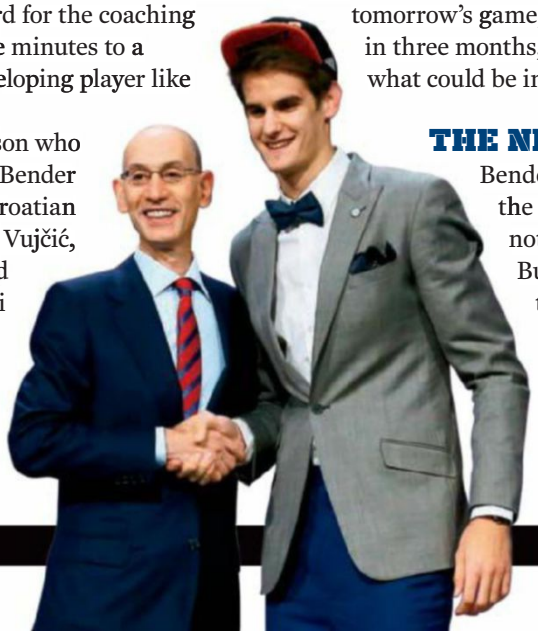
Two years ago, as a 16-year-old playing for Croatia against opponents one or two years older in the U18 Europe A-Division championships, Bender grabbed rebounds and threw long, baseball-style outlet passes that dropped into the hands of streaking guards. He handled the ball against full-court pressure and in pick-and-roll situations. He made passes from the high post. And he had impressive shot-blocking instincts that compensated somewhat for his lack of strength.

There are plenty of people who believe that Bender is still capable of that kind of play. They feel that he just hasn't gotten a chance to show it on a floundering Euroleague team. (Maccabi has a rich history but the team has struggled recently. That made it hard for the coaching staff to give minutes to a young, developing player like Bender.)

One person who believes in Bender is former Croatian star Nikola Vujčić, who starred for Maccabi in the 2000s. He founded a Croatian basketball academy in '05, which Bender would later attend. He then returned to Maccabi as a front-office employee in '13, bringing the talented youngster with him by signing Bender to a seven-year contract.

LOTTERY WINNER Bender was all smiles when he shook hands with commissioner Adam Silver (below) on draft night.

"[There are] two types of Dragan," Vujčić says. "One that is before he came to Maccabi, and then one at Maccabi. . . . Maccabi is not an easy environment for somebody like a kid. Because here only what [matters] is the result. We want to win tomorrow's game, not what will be in three months, especially not what could be in the future."



THE NEXT STEP

Bender is heading to the NBA, and he is not necessarily ready. But try telling that to fans. They have no trouble imagining a wiry Euro 7-footer taking the league by

MIKHAIL SERBIN/EB/GETTY IMAGES (BENDER DUNKING); NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (BENDER AND SILVER)

storm, because last season 7' 3" Kristaps Porzingis of Latvia did just that. Bender is, in the eyes of many NBA scouts, more advanced than Porzingis at the same age. But the Knicks' star played as a 20-year-old last year. Bender will debut at 18, and that will limit his immediate impact.

Plus, Bender is no Porzingis clone. Porzingis is a pure shooter who loves hip-hop. Bender is a playmaker who likes old-school music and old-school players. His primary hoops influence is Croatian legend Toni Kukoč, the 6' 10" lefty who debuted in the NBA with the Bulls in 1993, four years before Bender was born.

"I modeled my game after him," Bender says. A young Bender found VHS tapes of Kukoč at the Vujčić academy. As Bender studied them, it made more sense why his youth coaches were challenging him to function as an oversized point guard. He was captivated by the style of Kukoč, a positionless creator who valued passing over scoring. Bender wore Kukoč's number 7 as recently as the 2014–15 season.

Bender cannot, however, mimic the career timeline of Kukoč, who had eight seasons of European stardom and two Olympic silver medals behind him when he arrived in the NBA. He was a 25-year-old rookie, ready to be tested. "Now is a different time for a young guy," Bender says, explaining that an NBA team might be a more preferable development situation for a teenager than an impatient Euroleague club.

Kukoč also had multiple nicknames: the Spider of Split, Pink Panther, Croatian Sensation. The sound of the name *Dragan Bender* is so unique and warriorlike that he may have no need for nicknames. But he's had one since his days back home: "Roda." It's Croatian for stork, a soaring, gliding bird that in this case has no better choice than to ride the currents toward Phoenix. ■

NBA DRAFT FASHION AWARDS

Bold fashion statements weren't hard to find at the NBA draft, but four players wore outfits that were especially deserving of a second look. **BY CHARLIE BROADDUS**

KRIS DUNN

MINNESOTA TIMBERWOLVES, 5TH OVERALL

Kicks of the Night: What are *those*?! Dunn showed off his style by rocking sparkling Gucci shoes. They were a nice complement to his brown suit, which he bought at J.C. Penney and personalized with his high school mascot and number.

CARIS LEVERT

BROOKLYN NETS, 20TH OVERALL

Best Shoutout: LeVert's outfit was a-maize-ing. Paying homage to his Michigan Wolverines, he donned a suit featuring the school's maize-and-blue colors. Had he stayed with the Pacers, the team that drafted him before trading him to Brooklyn, he could have worn that suit for years to come.

BUDDY HIELD

NEW ORLEANS PELICANS, 6TH OVERALL

Class Act: Hield's suit matched his personality – cool and vibrant without being brash. He revealed some flair hidden in his jacket when he opened it to show "Buddy Buckets" written on each side. His white suit was the brightest of the night.

JAKOB POELTL

TORONTO RAPTORS, 9TH OVERALL

Best Undercover Swag: Most fans wouldn't know that Poeltl's plain, navy blue suit was hiding major pizzaz. The inside of his jacket was lined with a radiant red design that included a photo of him soaring through the air in his Utah uniform. Although Poeltl's statement was subtle, it might have been the best.

MIKE STOBE/GETTY IMAGES (DUNN); SIMON BRUTY (DUNN SHOES, LEVERT, HIELD, POELTL HEAD); ESQ CLOTHING 2016 (POELTL JACKET)

POSTER FACE-OFF

LEBRON JAMES Cleveland Cavaliers, forward	VS.	SIDNEY CROSBY Pittsburgh Penguins, center
31	AGE	28
6'8", 250 pounds	HEIGHT, WEIGHT	5'11", 200 pounds
Akron, Ohio	HOMETOWN	Cole Harbour, Nova Scotia, Canada
King James	NICKNAME	The Next One (a play on Wayne Gretzky's nickname, the Great One).
Wears 23 to honor one of his idols, Michael Jordan. He wore it in high school and for all nine seasons he's spent with the Cavs. (He was number 6 in his four seasons with the Miami Heat.)	NUMBER	Wears 87 because he was born on August 7, 1987 (8/7/87).
Carried the Cavaliers to the NBA championship, giving the city of Cleveland its first major pro sports title in 52 years.	HISTORY MAKER	Has been the Penguins' captain for nine consecutive seasons, a franchise record. When he was named captain in 2007, at 19 years and 297 days old, he was the league's youngest ever.
Was named NBA Finals MVP for the third time in his career. (He's won the Bill Russell trophy each time his team has won a ring.)	THAT'S VALUABLE	Won the Conn Smythe Trophy as the MVP of the NHL playoffs. It was the first time Crosby won the award and the second time he raised the Stanley Cup.
Has been named the NBA's most valuable player four times. He has finished in the top three in the voting five other times.	WAIT, THERE'S MORE!	Is a two-time winner of the Hart Trophy, given to the league's MVP. He's also been one of the three finalists on three other occasions, including this season.
Appeared on the cover of SPORTS ILLUSTRATED when he was a junior in high school.	PHENOM	Gave his first newspaper interview when he was just seven years old.
Watched *The Godfather* at least six times during the 2016 postseason.	SUPERSTITION	Has had many, including wearing the same hat for postgame and postpractice media interviews for an entire season.

GREG NELSON (JAMES); BRUCE BENNETT/GETTY IMAGES (CROSBY)

AUGUST 2016

Photograph by
GREG NELSON

LEBRON JAMES

CLEVELAND CAVALIERS FORWARD

2015-16 HIGHLIGHTS

REGULAR SEASON In his 13th NBA season, James was named an All-Star for the 12th straight time. He finished fifth in the league in scoring (25.3 points per game) and ninth in assists (6.8). He led the Cavaliers to the Central title – the eighth straight time his team won its division.

PLAYOFFS Cleveland won its first 10 postseason games before the Toronto Raptors won twice to even up the Eastern Conference finals at two games apiece. James then took over, leading the Cavs to two routs in which he averaged 28.0 points.

NBA FINALS The Golden State Warriors jumped out to a 3-1 lead before James came up with an epic response. He had back-to-back 41-point outbursts to force Game 7. In the deciding contest, James put up a triple double and had a huge blocked shot on a late Andre Iguodala layup attempt as the Cavs prevailed 93-89 to win their first NBA title.

Sports Illustrated KIDS

AUGUST 2016

Photograph by
JUSTIN K. ALLER/GETTY IMAGES

SIDNEY CROSBY

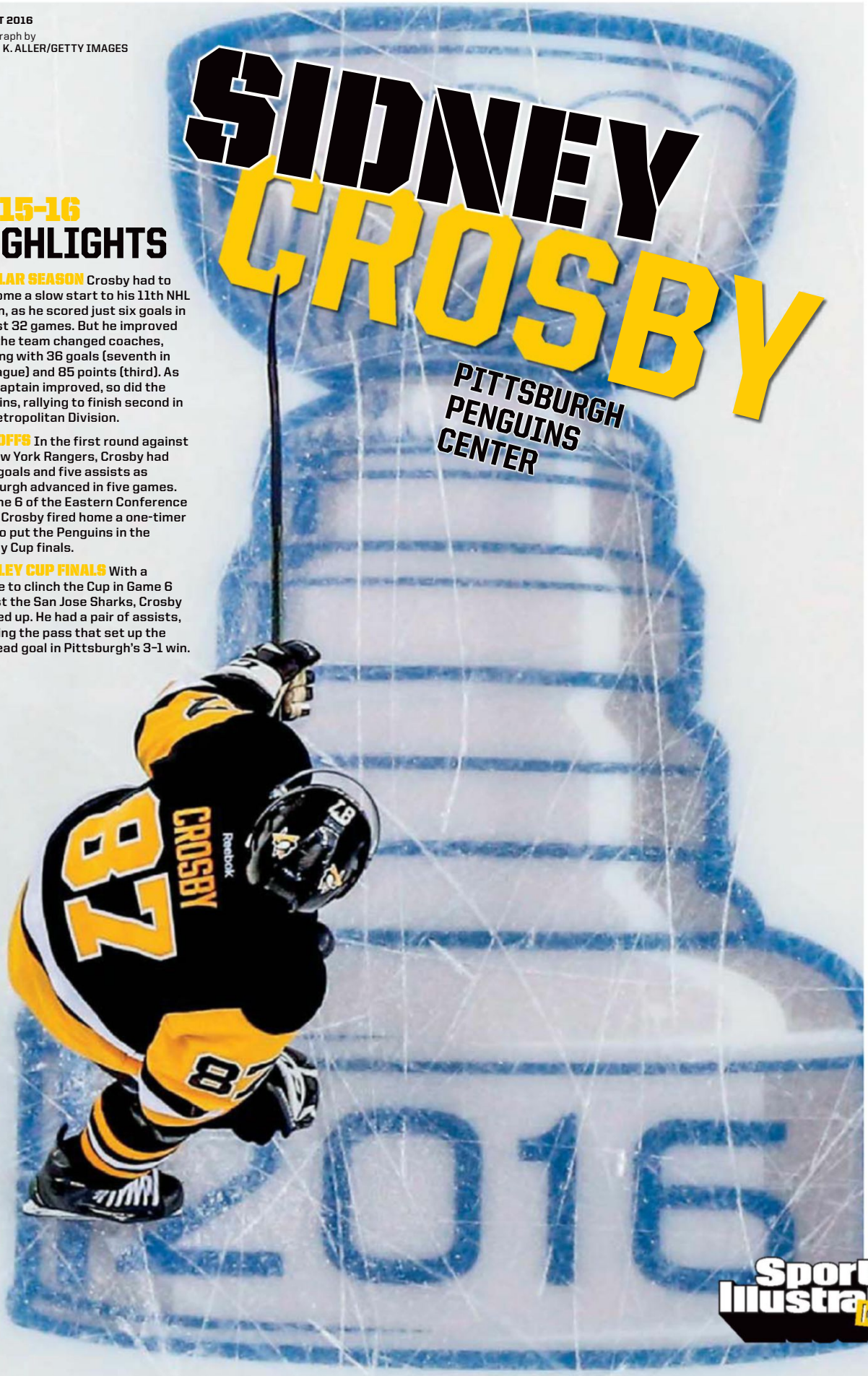
PITTSBURGH PENGUINS CENTER

2015-16 HIGHLIGHTS

REGULAR SEASON Crosby had to overcome a slow start to his 11th NHL season, as he scored just six goals in his first 32 games. But he improved after the team changed coaches, finishing with 36 goals (seventh in the league) and 85 points (third). As their captain improved, so did the Penguins, rallying to finish second in the Metropolitan Division.

PLAYOFFS In the first round against the New York Rangers, Crosby had three goals and five assists as Pittsburgh advanced in five games. In Game 6 of the Eastern Conference finals, Crosby fired home a one-timer in OT to put the Penguins in the Stanley Cup finals.

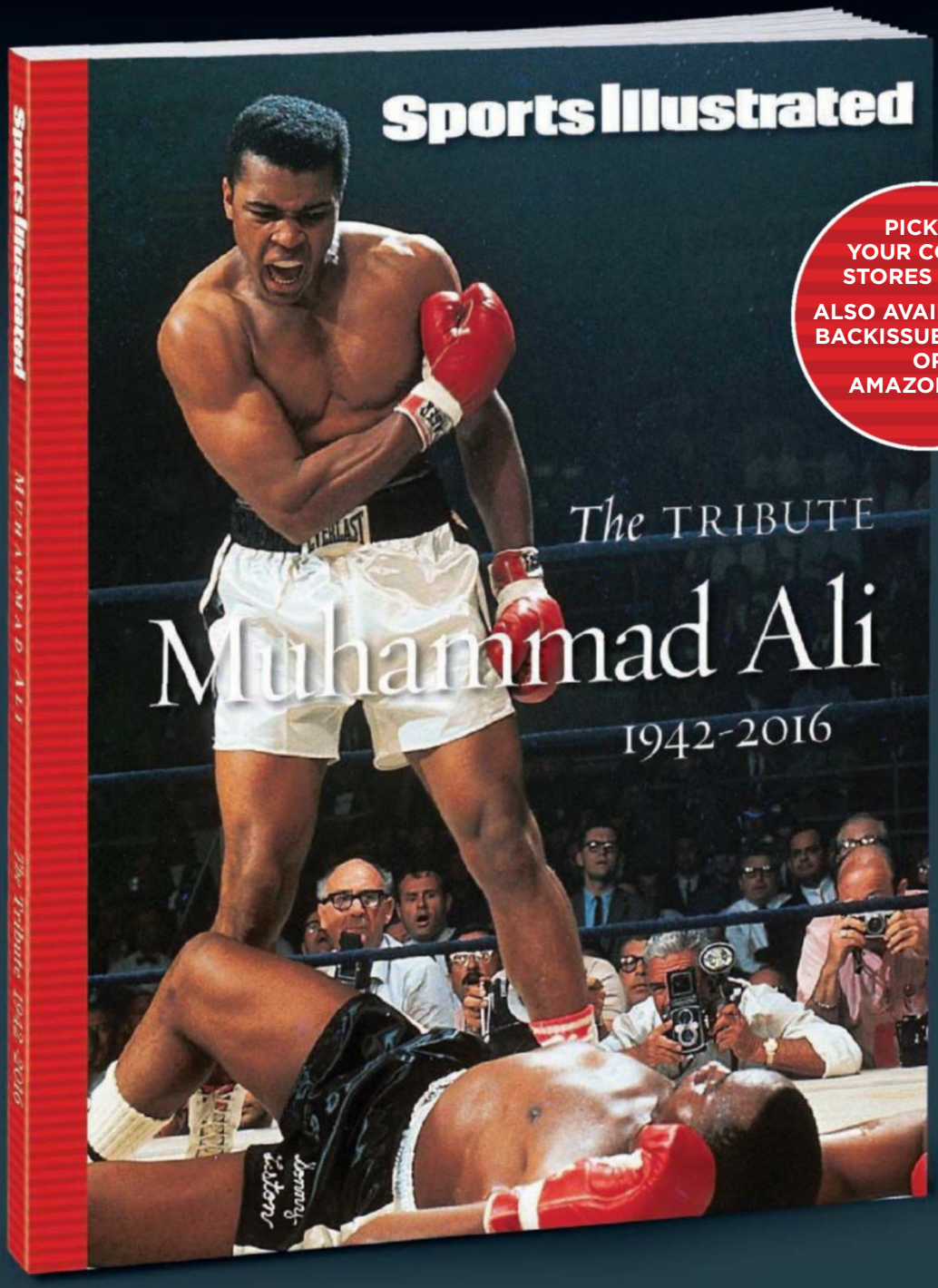
STANLEY CUP FINALS With a chance to clinch the Cup in Game 6 against the San Jose Sharks, Crosby stepped up. He had a pair of assists, including the pass that set up the go-ahead goal in Pittsburgh's 3-1 win.



Sports Illustrated KIDS

THE COMPLETE ALI

Champion • Rebel • Legend



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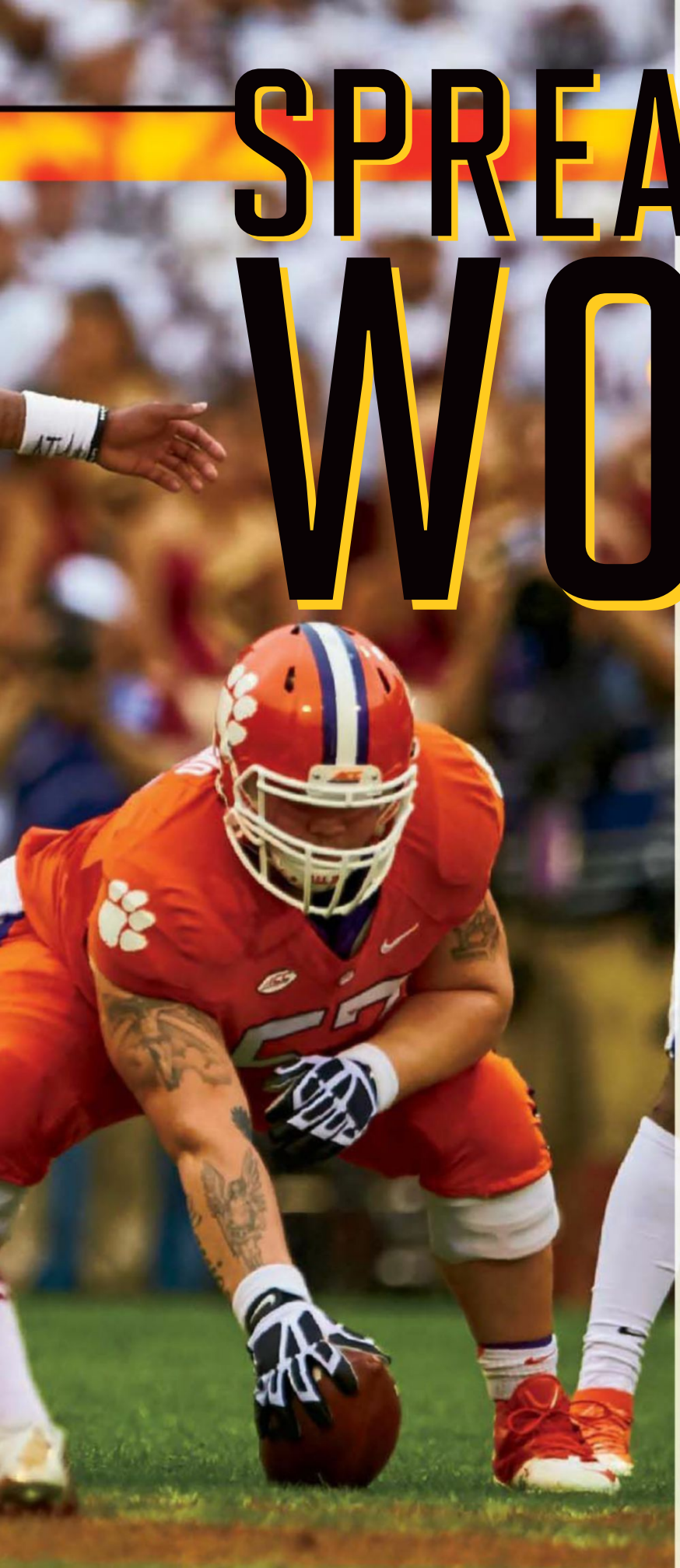
DOUBLE TROUBLE
Running Clemson's high-octane spread offense, Watson became the first player to throw for 4,000 yards and rush for 1,000.

SPREAD THE WORD



Heisman hopeful **DESHAUN WATSON** has Clemson thinking big.

BY MARK BECHTEL

After his team lost the biggest game of his life, Deshaun Watson was his usual cool self. No one would have blamed the 20-year-old Clemson quarterback for being emotional or frustrated after the Tigers fell to Alabama 45–40 in the national championship game last January, but Watson wasn't either of those things.

By showing such poise at such a young age, Watson has drawn comparisons with a star in another sport: LeBron James, who just happens to be Watson's favorite athlete. ("It's the way he prepares for games and the way he performs, but also the way he takes criticism," Watson recently told Athlon Sports. "It's everything about how he handles himself. He's someone I love to watch and will watch whenever I can.")

Watson calmly walked past celebrating Alabama players, then took the podium at the press conference and proclaimed, "I love my teammates, love my brothers, and you'll

DAVID E. KLUTHO

see us in Tampa next year," referring to the site of this year's title game.

It wouldn't be wise to bet against him. Against Alabama, Watson threw for 405 yards and ran for 73 more. He did all of that while facing a defense that allowed the third-fewest points in the country. Watson finished the season as the first player in FBS history to throw for at least 4,000 yards (he had 4,104) and rush for at least 1,000 (he totaled 1,105).

Watson finished third in the Heisman race. With most of his offensive teammates returning, his numbers this season should be just as gaudy as they were last year. Just as his team is the favorite to win the national championship, Watson is the favorite to take home the Heisman in December.

That's a pretty impressive list of superlatives for a kid who was just a sophomore. But then again, Watson has always been a quick learner.

HEISMAN HOPES
Watson struck a trophy pose after leading the Tigers past North Carolina in the ACC title game.

BY THE NUMBERS

478
Yards of total offense Watson amassed in January against Alabama, a record for the national championship game.

17–1
Clemson's record when Watson starts and finishes a game.

4
Watson's jersey number. It was retired by Clemson to honor Steve Fuller, but Fuller allowed it to come out of retirement for Watson.

FAST START

When he was a seventh-grader in Gainesville, Georgia, Watson played linebacker because his school had a policy that only eighth-graders could play quarterback. But when the regular QB got hurt, Watson was selected to fill in under center.

In high school, Watson played on the varsity in his first season, becoming just the third freshman started by his coach, Bruce Miller, in nearly 30 years. And he even got an early start on his college career. He graduated from high school a semester ahead of schedule so he could practice with the Tigers in the spring before his freshman season.

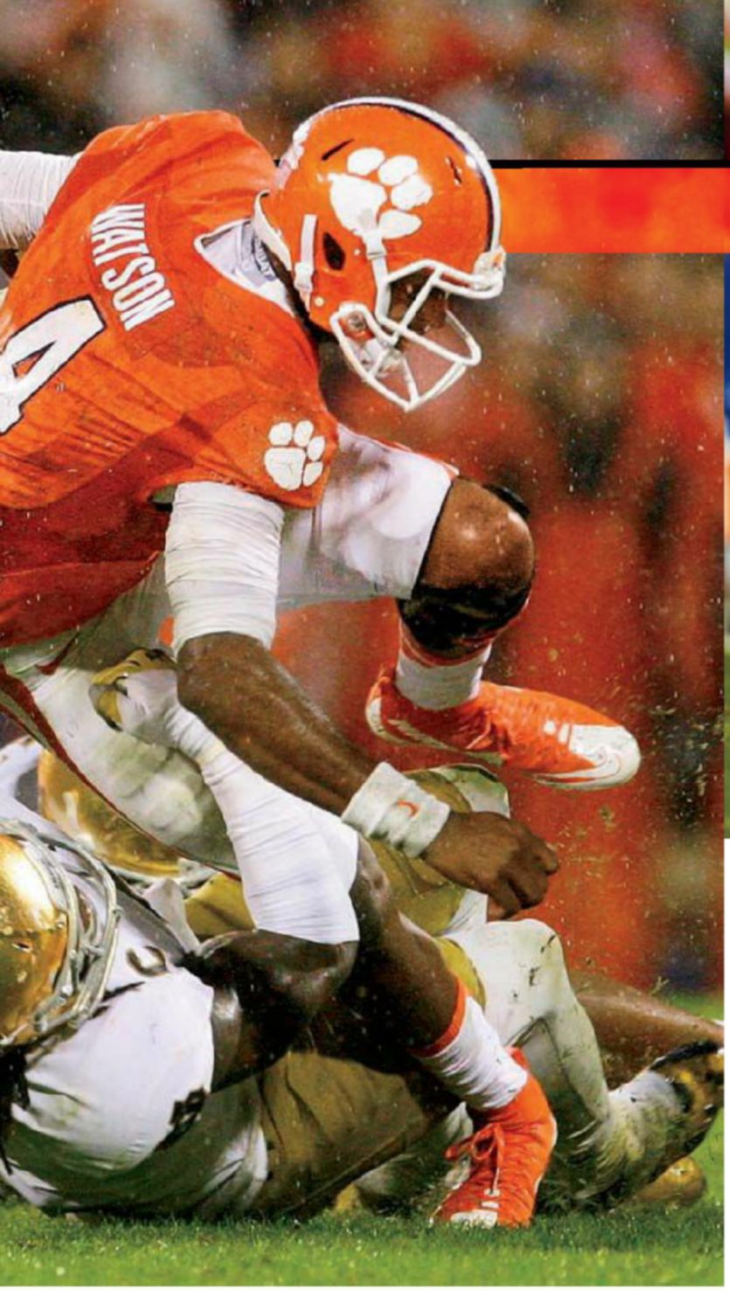
On one play during those sessions, Watson was being chased by Shaq Lawson, a defensive end who would go on to become a first-round draft pick of the Buffalo Bills. Most players would have just run out-of-bounds — it was only practice, after all, and Lawson is a 270-pound monster. But Watson gave a hip fake, stopped, and threw a 60-yard rocket to a receiver for a touchdown. "How the heck did that just happen?" recalls Eric Mac Lain, a senior guard on last year's team. "I watched [former Clemson All-America QB] Tajh Boyd for four years. I never saw him make a play like that. This kid just stepped on campus and was phenomenal."

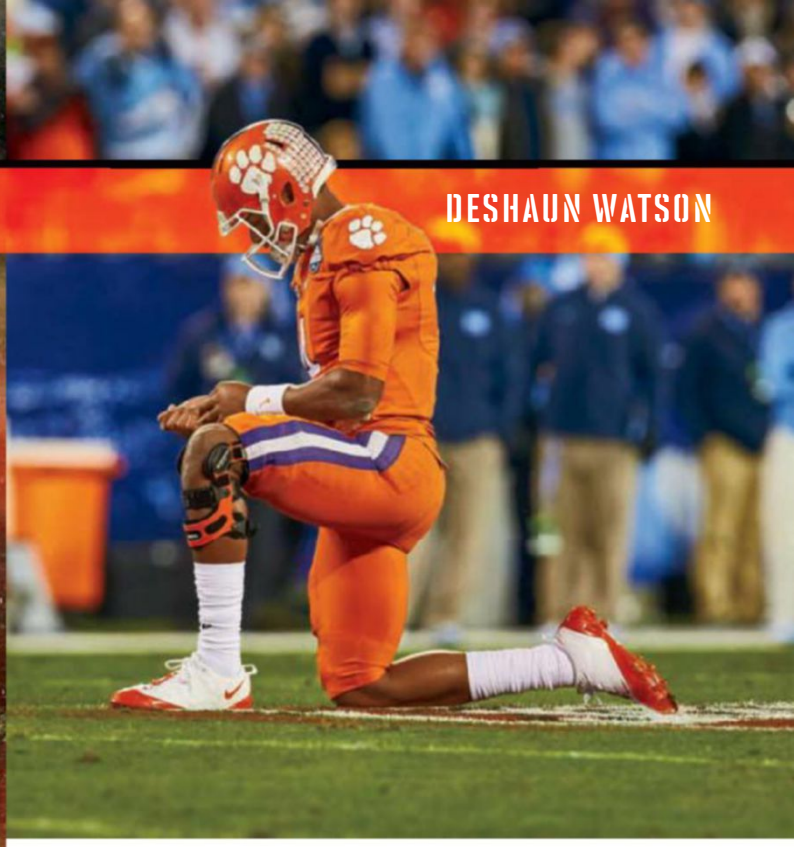
Watson arrived on the Clemson campus as one of the most sought-after quarterbacks in the country. He threw for more than 13,000 yards in his high school career and led Gainesville to a state championship.

And he did it while coping with a lot of adversity at home.

When Watson was a freshman in high school, his mother, Deann, was diagnosed with tongue cancer. She had surgery, which temporarily kept her from being able to talk, and was in the hospital for several months. Watson called his mom every night, launching into long stories about how his day went so she wouldn't

CHRIS KEANE (POSE)





GROUNDED
The down-to-earth Watson is nice to just about everyone he sees – except for opposing defenders.

have to try to talk. Occasionally, she'd flag down a doctor or a nurse and scribble a note for them to read into the phone. Watson gave her a necklace with a small key that has the word HOPE engraved on it.

Deann got through the tough spell. That shouldn't come as a surprise: She's always been a fighter. A few years earlier, she heard about an organization called Habitat for Humanity that builds houses for those in need.

Deann and her four children were living in a rough neighborhood at the time, so she decided that she'd try to get Habitat for Humanity to build them a better home. To do so, she had to volunteer for 300 hours — while working a full-time job to support her family. But she did it, and the Watsons moved into their new house when Deshaun was 11.

The furnishings were provided by another organization, Home for the Holidays, which is run by former NFL running back Warrick Dunn. "I played as him on video games," Watson said. "And he's sitting right there giving us a house and giving us furniture and food. I was jumping for joy."

Watson was so moved by the experience that he now does extensive work for Habitat for Humanity, giving back to those in need. "[Dunn] inspired me to do the same thing," says Watson.

TIME TO SHINE

Watson will likely embark on his own NFL career following this season. He's a junior, but he'll be eligible for the draft, and he's in position to possibly be taken first overall. "He's big and fast and mechanically very good," one scout said. "He throws with velocity and touch and throws a very good deep ball."

Watson still has some unfinished business before the draft, though. He watched the Tigers' loss to Alabama a handful of times over the summer. Sometimes he dissected his play, other times he just watched it to marvel at what a great game it was.

Watson also followed the exploits of his idol, LeBron, over the summer, celebrating as the Cavs won the NBA title a year after coming tantalizingly close. "Kings do king things!" tweeted Watson after the Finals.

Now it's his turn to put on a regal performance. You know he'll be ready. ■

TYLER SMITH/GETTY IMAGES (RUNNING); CHRIS KEANE (KNEELING)

THE 2016 TO

Heisman hopefuls will determine which te

BY KELLEN BECOATS & CHARLIE BROADDUS

1 CLEMSON

Deshaun Watson (4) will lead the Tigers' offense again this season after falling short of a Heisman Trophy and a national title last year. The QB scored 47 touchdowns and eclipsed 5,000 yards of total offense in 2015 en route to winning the Davey O'Brien Award as the nation's best signal-caller. He's poised for similar results this year, when he will be surrounded by many familiar faces, including running back Wayne Gallman. The only Tiger to rush for more yards than Watson in 2015, Gallman will help carry the load in the backfield, opening up the passing game. Lanky receiver Mike Williams is also back after a neck injury ended his junior season during the first game. Clemson lost eight starters on defense, but with the country's best offense, the Tigers will make it back to the national championship on firepower alone. And this year, they will come home happy.

P20

eam finishes on top.

2 OKLAHOMA

After falling to Clemson in the playoff semifinals last year, the Sooners will be back in the national championship picture thanks to a dynamic duo. Quarterback **Baker Mayfield** finished last season with 3,700 passing yards and 43 total touchdowns, but he was the odd man out when it came time to pick the three Heisman finalists. Running back Samaje Perine is an offensive machine in his own right. He ran for 1,349 yards in 2015 after going for 1,713 as a freshman. If Mayfield gets left out of the Heisman festivities again this year, it might be because Perine overshadows him. Sure, it's a potential controversy. But it's a nice problem for Sooners coach Bob Stoops to have.

3 LSU

Leonard Fournette was the front-runner for the 2015 Heisman until Alabama's defense stopped him in his tracks. He ran for just 31 yards in a 30–16 defeat, sending the Tigers on a three-game losing streak that almost cost coach Les Miles his job. Fournette (1,953 yards) is back and will be determined to finish the job, but he'll need help from quarterback Brandon Harris, who was erratic as a sophomore.

4 MICHIGAN

As the best two-way player in college football, **Jabrill Peppers** could build a Heisman-worthy season. Peppers, who is moving from defensive back to linebacker, also saw time at quarterback, running back, and wide receiver. Oh, and he was one of the best kick returners in the country. Michigan showed major improvement under coach Jim Harbaugh. With Peppers leading the way on both sides of the ball, things will only get better.

AL TIELEMANS (WATSON); ALONZO ADAMS/AP (MAYFIELD); CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES (FOURNETTE); TONY DING/AP (PEPPERS)

5 ALABAMA

Tailback **Bo Scarbrough** didn't have the eye-popping numbers of a Heisman candidate (104 yards in seven games). Assuming he holds onto the job as starter for the Crimson Tide, though, the sophomore could contend for the trophy. His skill set is similar to that of 2015 Heisman winner Derrick Henry, so Scarbrough should excel in offensive coordinator Lane Kiffin's scheme, which is built around the run. That means Scarbrough could put up big numbers, but he'll be tested early. Alabama faces two top-20 teams (USC and Ole Miss) in the season's first three weeks.

6 OHIO STATE

Late in the 2014 season, quarterback **J.T. Barrett** suffered a broken ankle. Cardale Jones stepped in and led the Buckeyes to a national championship. So last year Barrett and Jones split time under center. Now with Jones in the NFL, Barrett, who finished fifth in the Heisman voting in '14, will again lead the Buckeyes' attack. Ohio State has only six returning starters, though, so Barrett will have to shoulder a heavy load. History (he's 13–2 as a starter) suggests he can do just that.

9 NOTRE DAME

DeShone Kizer could be a Heisman candidate this year. Or he could be a backup. After taking over for an injured Malik Zaire early last season, a freshman Kizer (2,880 yards passing) quarterbacked the Fighting Irish to a 9–3 record and a Fiesta Bowl appearance. With Zaire healthy, the Irish have quite a battle brewing. Whoever wins, the Irish offense, which is loaded with quality youngsters, will be in good hands.

10 GEORGIA

Nick Chubb was on his way to challenging LSU's Leonard Fournette for the title of most dominant running back in the SEC before a knee injury against Tennessee ended his season (and his streak of 13 straight 100-yard games). New coach Kirby Smart isn't going to rush Chubb back. (Though of course the Bulldogs could use him for the opener against North Carolina.) When the junior does return, Georgia's offense will go from pretty good to elite in a hurry.

11 USC

Trojans coach Clay Helton has a lot to do: settle into a new job, decide on a quarterback, and replace several key defensive players. But nine returning offensive starters will help — none more than junior wide receiver **JuJu Smith-Schuster**. Helton will likely go with a more ground-based offensive game, but Smith-Schuster (1,454 receiving yards last year) will still be the most dangerous weapon on an exciting Pac-12 team.

KENT GIDLEY/UA ATHLETICS (SCARBROUGH); JAY LAPRETE/AP (BARRETT); MICHAEL CONROY/AP (KIZER); FREDERICK BREEDON/GETTY IMAGES (CHUBB); HARRY HOW/GETTY IMAGES (SMITH-SCHUSTER)

7 STANFORD

Christian McCaffrey was second in last year's Heisman voting and remains one of the most interesting prospects in college football. He was revolutionary last season, excelling as a return specialist and a running back as he broke the NCAA single-season record for all-purpose yards (3,864) held by Barry Sanders. McCaffrey is the Swiss Army knife that should make opponents in the Pac-12 — and potential playoff contenders — beware.

8 FLORIDA STATE

Dalvin Cook is as established as anyone in college football. The junior back has rushed for 2,700 yards and 27 touchdowns since he arrived in Tallahassee. With its entire offense returning, Florida State is certain to vie for a playoff spot. That will mean additional exposure for Cook, who set a school record last year with 1,935 all-purpose yards despite playing much of the season with hamstring and ankle injuries. If he's healthy, watch out.

12 OLE MISS

The Rebels have the most established quarterback in the SEC in **Chad Kelly**. The speedy 6'2" 224-pounder threw for 4,042 yards last season, breaking Eli Manning's school record by more than 400 yards. What can he do for an encore? Get the Rebels, who have been as high as No. 3 in the polls in each of the past two seasons, over the hump and into the SEC championship game.

13 MICHIGAN STATE

All-Everything QB Connor Cook is gone to the NFL, which means the gig in East Lansing belongs to **Tyler O'Connor**. The fifth-year senior led the Spartans to an upset of Ohio State last fall when Cook was sidelined with a shoulder injury. If his performance against the Buckeyes was any indication, O'Connor won't be flashy. But with a defense like Michigan State's, he doesn't have to be.

14 MIAMI

After a promising freshman season, QB Brad Kaaya fell into a sophomore slump (16 TDs, versus 26 in 2015). He's still a bright spot, though, and new coach Mark Richt's arrival bodes well for Miami.

15 OKLAHOMA STATE

The Cowboys have great receivers and an elite QB, Mason Rudolph (3,770 yards passing last year). The question is on the other side of the football: a so-so defense lost several top players.

16 TENNESSEE

QB Josh Dobbs (2,291 yards passing, 671 rushing) gives the Vols a chance to return to SEC relevance. Tennessee snuck back into the Top 25 last year after five straight losing seasons.

17 HOUSTON

Houston tied a school mark with 13 wins, including a victory over Florida State in the Peach Bowl. That game's offensive MVP, Greg Ward (2,828 passing yards and 1,108 rushing yards), is back.

18 NORTH CAROLINA

Running back Elijah Hood racked up 17 TDs and 1,534 yards as a sophomore last season. But with QB Marquise Williams gone, Hood will have to shoulder a much bigger load.

19 TEXAS A&M

Trevor Knight was the MVP of the 2014 Sugar Bowl for Oklahoma. After graduating, the QB transferred to the Aggies and will have one season to show the Sooners what they're missing.

20 LOUISVILLE

At the Music City Bowl, Lamar Jackson became only the third player in FBS history to run and pass for 200 yards in a postseason game. Look for the Cardinals to continue their hot streak.

MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ/AP (MCCAFFREY); KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES (COOK); ROGELIO V. SOLIS/AP (KELLY); AL GOLDIS/AP (O'CONNOR)

FIVE MINUTE GUIDE

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

These five rivalry games are always fun to watch, but this year they could determine who plays for the national championship.

1 ALABAMA AT LSU NOV. 5

This is the game of the year. Not only will it likely decide which SEC team gets a spot in the playoff, but it will also feature a dominant Alabama D against LSU running back Leonard Fournette. Will a new team reign atop the SEC? The hosts hope so.

2 OHIO STATE AT OKLAHOMA SEPT. 17

Each team is quarterbacked by a Heisman candidate (J.T. Barrett of the Buckeyes and OU's Baker Mayfield), so the game will likely come down to the secondaries. Oklahoma's defensive backfield returns intact, but OSU lost three of its four starters to the NFL. Advantage: Sooners.

3 CLEMSON AT FLORIDA STATE OCT. 29

Now that Clemson is on top of the football world, everyone will be waiting to see if the Tigers can go undefeated for a second straight regular season. Perennial power Florida State knows what it's like to have a target on its back. If Clemson is going to slip up, it could be here.

4 STANFORD AT NOTRE DAME OCT. 15

This is the 20th straight season that the Cardinal and Fighting Irish will do battle. (Notre Dame has won 11 of the previous 19 games.) Stanford's Christian McCaffrey is the most versatile weapon in college football, and he could have a big day against a lackluster Notre Dame defense.

5 MICHIGAN AT OHIO STATE NOV. 26

Jim Harbaugh has brought the bite back to the Wolverines. Facing a Buckeyes team that lost five first-rounders to the NFL, Michigan will be vying for its first College Football Playoff bid. After a few years of irrelevance, The Game, as it is known, should be back in full force.

EXPRESS YOURSELF

We predict what faces these animated coaches will be making this season.

Michigan coach **Jim Harbaugh** will be super pumped after his team earns a spot in the playoff.

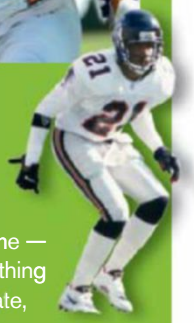
Ohio State's **Urban Meyer** will be angry when he realizes he lost too many stars to win the Big Ten.

Florida State coach **Jimbo Fisher** will be disappointed and wishing he still had Jameis Winston.

Bob Stoops' Sooners will win big this season, but his eternally straight face won't give away his excitement.

MARVIN GENTRY/USA TODAY SPORTS (ALABAMA-LSU); GREGORY SHAMUS/GETTY IMAGES (HARBAUGH); SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES (MEYER); KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES (FISHER); STREETER LECKA/GETTY IMAGES (STOOPS); OTTO GRUELE JR/GETTY IMAGES (BARRY SANDERS JR.); ANDY HAYT/GETTY IMAGES (BARRY SANDERS); GRANT HALVERSON/GETTY IMAGES (DEION SANDERS JR.); FOCUS ON SPORT/GETTY IMAGES (DEION SANDERS); G.M. ANDREWS/AP (CALHOUN); STEVE NURENBERG/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP (WHITE); RIC TAPIA/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP (BANNER); CHRIS PARENT/LSU ATHLETICS (MILES, 2)

SANDERS AND SONS



Two players with similar — and familiar — names will try to make an impact on the field this fall. Like his Hall of Fame father, **Deion Sanders Jr.** *(above right)* is a cornerback. The SMU senior also takes after his dad *(right)* — who was nicknamed Prime Time — when it comes to fashion. Junior has started a clothing company called Well Off Forever. At Oklahoma State, another Sanders will try to step out of his father's shadow. **Barry Sanders Jr.** *(above left)* has transferred to the school where his father *(left)* won the Heisman trophy in 1988. The graduate senior, who rushed for 672 yards at Stanford, will try to shed comparisons to his dad. Luckily, speed and evasiveness run in the family.

TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

College players come in all shapes and sizes. If two of the smallest — TCU receiver Desmon White (5' 7", 160 pounds) and Kent State wideout Ernest Calhoun (5' 6", 155 pounds) — stood together on a scale, they'd need 45 pounds to balance out 6' 9", 360-pound USC offensive lineman Zach Banner. That's about 10 helmets or 50 footballs.

NOW THAT'S PLAIN CRAZY! (OR IS IT?)

Some players and coaches can't tell you why, but they have some silly superstitions.

Gary Patterson
Before the 2010 season, TCU's coach went on a safari in Africa. The Horned Frogs then went 13–0. Patterson went to Africa again in 2014, and TCU had another big year, going 12–1 and narrowly missing a spot in the College Football Playoff. Patterson saw a trend. And so he had an excuse to take a few weeks off and snap some pictures of animals before last season, when his Horned Frogs went 11–2.

Les Miles
Protein is a major part of anyone's diet, which is perhaps why the LSU coach started eating blades of grass during games. (There is video evidence of Miles doing so all over the Internet.) Miles has said that Baton Rouge's grass is the tastiest. It makes you wonder if he mows his grass at home or just settles down for an afternoon snack.

Nick Chubb
Many of us have a lucky something or other that we carry with us for big occasions. It just so happens that the Georgia running back has a lucky undershirt that he always wears on game day. Chubb also has the same sports drink on game day, and he insists that the bathroom light of his bedroom back home remain on during his games. Whatever helps you win a Heisman.

REMEMBER WHEN?

The NFL's top players took very different routes to professional stardom.

AARON RODGERS CALIFORNIA 2002–04

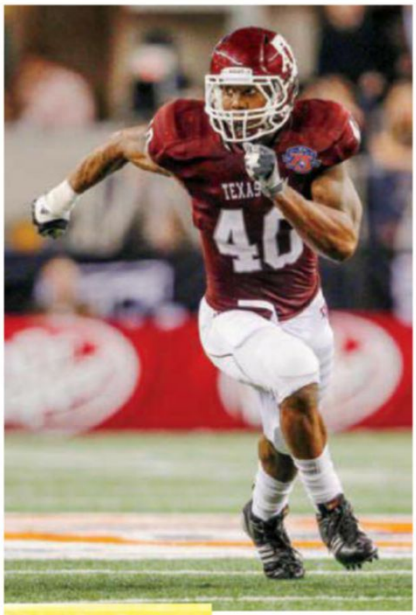
After spending one season in junior college, the lightly recruited QB transferred to Cal. He torched the Pac-10 and was considered a possible No. 1 overall pick, but he slipped all the way to 24th, where the Packers got him.

ANTONIO BROWN CENTRAL MICHIGAN 2007–09

The league's leader in catches in each of the past two seasons for the Steelers walked on for the Chippewas. He was quickly given a scholarship and put up big numbers for three years. Pittsburgh grabbed him in the sixth round of the 2010 draft.

J.J. WATT CENTRAL MICHIGAN 2007, WISCONSIN 2009–10

A tight end in high school, Watt spent one season as Brown's teammate before transferring to Wisconsin, where he walked on and became a first-round talent.



VON MILLER

TEXAS A&M 2007–10

The Super Bowl 50 MVP transitioned from defensive end to outside linebacker for the Aggies, winning the Butkus Award in 2010.

LUKE KUECHLY

BOSTON COLLEGE 2009–11

The Panthers star became the first true freshman to lead the Eagles in tackles. Carolina took him ninth overall after his Butkus-winning junior season.

ROBERT BECK (RODGERS); ANDREW HANCOCK (BROWN); AARON M. SPENCER/AP (MILLER); JOHN BIEVER (WATT); DAMIAN STROHMEYER (KUECHLY)

TOM BRADY MICHIGAN 1996–99

The Patriots' signal-caller was seventh on the depth chart when he enrolled at Michigan. He left the school with the fourth-most yards in Wolverines history, but that was only good enough to get him drafted in the sixth round.

TODD GURLEY

GEORGIA 2012–14

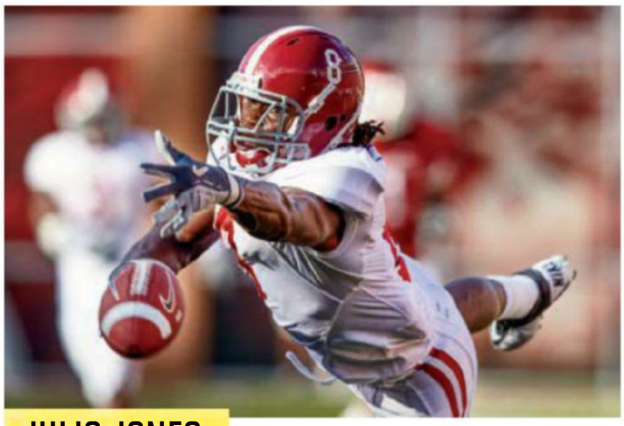
Gurley had 100 yards rushing and a 100-yard kickoff return in his first game as a Bulldog. His his career was cut short by a knee injury in his junior season, but that didn't stop him: Gurley ran for 1,106 yards for the Rams last year and was the NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year.

HEINZ KLUETMEIER (BRADY); POUYA DIANAT (GURLEY); JOHN BIEVER (WILSON); DAMIAN STROHMEYER (JONES); ELAINE THOMPSON/AP (GRONKOWSKI)

RUSSELL WILSON

NC STATE 2008–10, WISCONSIN 2011

After three successful seasons with the Wolfpack, Wilson transferred to Wisconsin and led the Badgers to the Rose Bowl. Still, he wasn't drafted until the third round.



JULIO JONES

ALABAMA 2008–2010

The Falcons receiver has been destined for stardom since he arrived at Bama. In 2008, he became just the 11th true freshman to start a season opener for the Crimson Tide.

ROB GRONKOWSKI

ARIZONA 2007–09

Injuries limited Gronk to just 22 college games — none after his sophomore season, in which he led the Pac-10 in TD receptions. The Patriots saw his potential and took him in the second round, and he has become one of the NFL's most dangerous weapons.

A LONG TIME COMING

When LeBron James led the Cavaliers to the NBA title in June, it marked the first time a team from Cleveland won a major pro championship since 1964, when the Browns ruled the NFL. That 52-year drought was filled with countless, heartbreaking close calls for the city's beleaguered fans. Here is a history in pictures of Cleveland's pain.

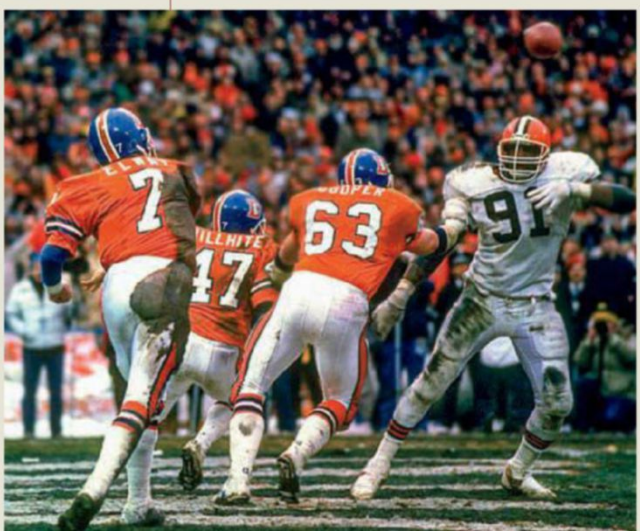
THE MISERY THAT WAS

RED RIGHT 88

Down 14–12 in the closing minute of a playoff game against Oakland in 1981, the Browns opted for a pass instead of a 30-yard field goal attempt. Brian Sipe's throw was intercepted in the end zone.

THE DRIVE

The game clock read 5:32 when John Elway and the Broncos took possession at their own two-yard line, trailing the Browns by seven in the fourth quarter of the 1986–87 AFC title game. Fifteen plays and 5:01 later, Elway found Mark Jackson in the end zone to send the game into overtime, when Denver won on a field goal.



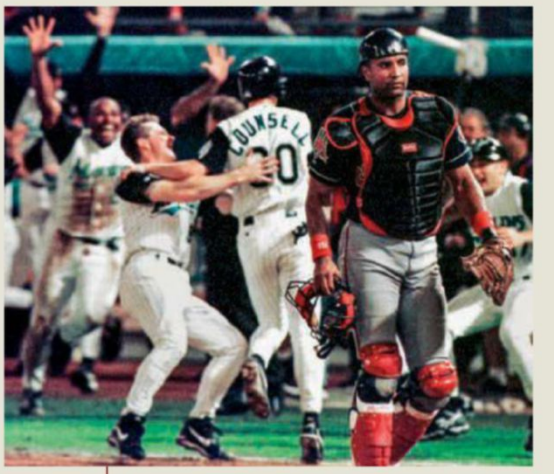
THE FUMBLE

In a rematch the next year, Browns back Earnest Byner plowed toward a game-tying score with 1:12 remaining. But Denver poked the ball loose at the one-yard line, and the Broncos recovered.

FINALLY, FIRST! James celebrated his city's long-awaited title at a parade that attracted an estimated 1.3 million people to downtown Cleveland.

THE SHOT

Michael Jordan's series-winner over Craig Ehlo in the 1989 opening round may be best remembered for the reactions: Jordan punched the air; Ehlo collapsed to the court.



THE BLOWN SAVE

Three outs away from the 1997 World Series title, Indians closer Jose Mesa gave up two singles and a sacrifice fly, allowing the Marlins to send Game 7 into extra innings. After a botched grounder in the 11th, Florida's Edgar Renteria singled home a run to give the Marlins the Series win.

THE DECISION

Bad: LeBron hastily removed his jersey following the Cavs' elimination in Boston in 2010. Worse: the announcement eight weeks later that he was leaving town to join the Miami Heat.

GENE J. PUSKAR/AP (PARADE); HEINZ KLUETMEIER (RED RIGHT 88); TONY TOMSIC (DRIVE); RON HEFLIN/AP (FUMBLE); CARL SKALAK (SHOT); JEFF HAYNES/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (BLOWN SAVE); ELISE AMENDOLA/AP (DECISION)

The GREATEST

MUHAMMAD ALI, who passed away in June, made a huge impact in the ring and out of it.

Illustrations by **Pablo Marcos**; color by **Oscar Gonzalez**

Money Maker

She's a record-setting, flamethrowing pitcher. Meet MONICA ABBOTT, the first woman in U.S. team sports to sign a $1 million contract.

BY CHRISTINA M. TAPPER

Photographs by
Michael J. LeBrecht II

This is a joke, right?!

That was pitcher Monica Abbott's initial thought after she read a text message from Connie May, the general manager of the Houston Scrap Yard Dawgs of National Pro Fastpitch (NPF), a professional softball league. The message offered Abbott the opportunity to make history. *Big money* history.

When the 31-year-old Abbott received the text, she was in Japan, where she pitches in the spring and fall. May implied that Abbott — an NPF restricted free agent — could be a pioneer like Nolan Ryan, who became Major League Baseball's first million-dollar player when he signed with the Houston Astros in 1979. (NPF started in 2004 and has six franchises, including the Dawgs, an expansion team in its first season.)

"[There was a part of] the text that said something like, 'Eventually there will be a million-dollar athlete in softball. The question is, will it be you?' " Abbott remembers.

A flurry of reactions and questions followed. (Insert stunned emoji face.)

Whaaat?

No way.

Are the Dawgs serious?

They were. And for good reason. Abbott is the sport's best pitcher. She has won both the NPF title and pitcher of the year award three times. The lefty also threw the first Olympic perfect game, in 2008. (She recorded two more after that feat — one in NPF and the other in the Japan Softball League, where she's a four-time champion.) In 2012, her 77-mph fastball set a new NPF pitch speed record.

On May 5, after making a formal offer, the Dawgs officially announced that Abbott had agreed to a six-year, $1 million deal. Her base pay is $20,000 each season, which runs June through August. The rest of her salary is bonuses.

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK
Abbott is in her first year with the Scrap Yard Dawgs, who made their NPF debut this season.

The money, however, didn't make it easy to walk away from the Chicago Bandits, the team Abbott led to an NPF title with a 0.31 ERA last year. She also held batters to .106 at the plate in 112⅓ innings and allowed only five earned runs.

"This was one of the toughest decisions of my career. I wasn't thinking about leaving Chicago. I wanted to set up a contract to retire there," Abbott says. "But if I didn't take this contract [with Houston], I would not be standing in my truth. This was bigger than me."

Abbott, now in her ninth NPF season, wants to see female athletes — and women outside of sports — earn more. The average NPF salary for contracted players is between $5,000 and $6,000 per summer. (The average MLB salary is around $4.4 million per season.) She hopes her deal can set an example and open doors for others to follow. "Knowing your value — your worth — it's so important," Abbott says. "I want my contract to create more opportunity and change in women's salaries."

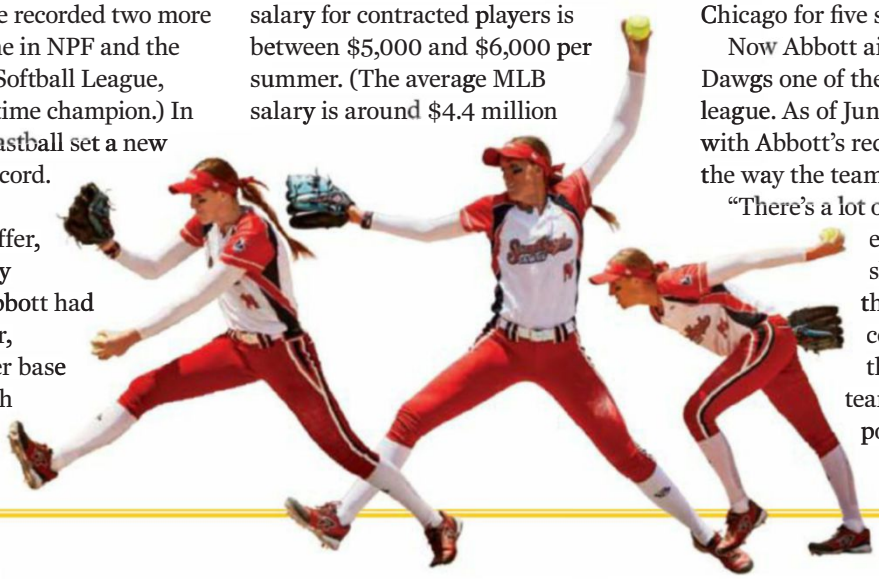
Before the 6'3" flamethrower from Santa Cruz, California, became softball's biggest game-changer, Abbott was actually a subpar player by her own standards.

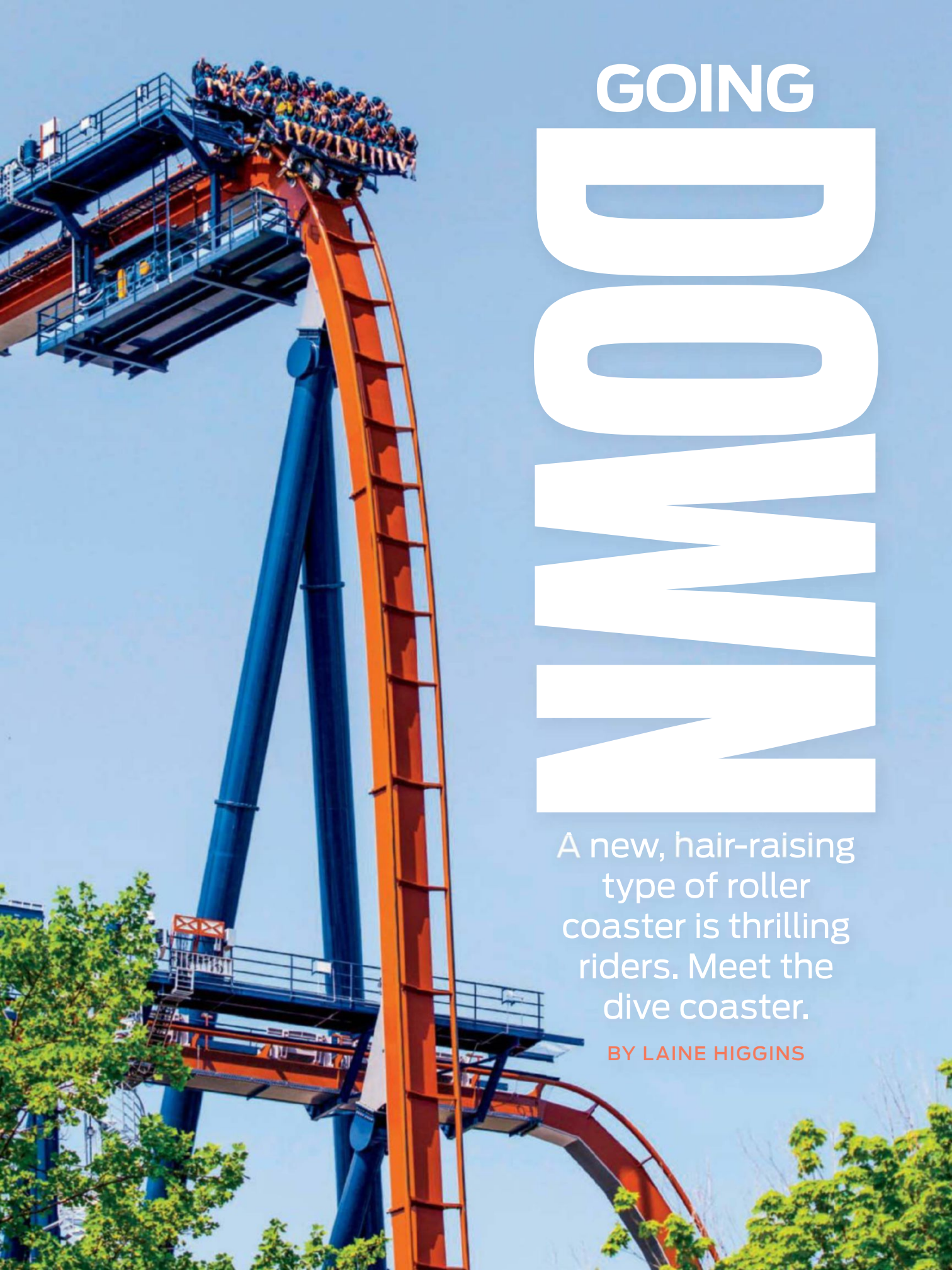
"I wasn't good," says Abbott, who got her start playing T-ball at age five. "My older sister, Jessica, was the all-star of rec ball. When I was 12, Jessica was pitching and I had to catch for her. I hated it."

Shortly after, a pitching coach recommended that Monica get on the mound too. It was a good suggestion. Abbott went on to play college softball at Tennessee, where she had 23 no-hitters and six perfect games. In 2007, she was drafted by the Washington Glory. Abbott won a title and earned the first of three NPF championship series MVP awards that year. She had short stints with two other NPF teams before pitching in Chicago for five seasons.

Now Abbott aims to make the Dawgs one of the top teams in the league. As of June 27, they were 9–8, with Abbott's record at 5–1. She likes the way the team is jelling.

"There's a lot of good competitive energy on this team," she says. "I'm not only thrilled about my contract, but I'm also thrilled about my teammates and the potential we have."





GOING DOWN

A new, hair-raising type of roller coaster is thrilling riders. Meet the dive coaster.

BY LAINE HIGGINS

Roller coasters come in several types, many with futuristic-sounding names such as giga coaster, hyper coaster and strata coaster. But the scariest one has a simple name: the dive coaster.

There are only three dive coasters in the United States. The most recent just opened at Cedar Point, an amusement park on the shores of Lake Erie just outside of Sandusky, Ohio, that is home to 18 of the world's most insane coasters. its newest ride, Valravn, is the tallest, fastest and longest dive coaster in the world. Valravn is so gargantuan that it broke 10 world records.

Valravn's world records

Named for a mythical Danish supernatural bird, Valravn towers 223 feet over the park. (It is nine feet taller than the next-largest dive coaster, Busch Gardens Williamsburg's Griffon.) Unlike most traditional roller coasters, dive coasters give riders the sensation of free fall by sending riders over the lift hill at a 90-degree angle. (That means they are headed straight for the ground.)

The unique design of Valravn, engineered by Swiss firm Bolliger & Mabillard, adds to the thrill factor by holding riders at the top of a 214-foot vertical drop for four seconds before plunging them down the track at 75 miles per hour. "We're always looking to take thrills to the next level," says Cedar Point project manager Adam Pooch.

HEAVY LIFTING
The tallest, fastest, longest dive coaster in the world required lots of time – and several large cranes – to build.

The rest of the features on Valravn's 3,415-foot long twisted steel track are not for the faint of heart. Following that first scary drop, the ride includes a 165-foot Immelman (a half-loop with a half-twist), a dive loop, and a 270-degree roll. Ridegoers experience G-forces similar to what an astronaut feels traveling on a space shuttle.

Building a world-record breaking coaster was a challenge as big as the ride itself. Pooch had to use special equipment to bring the king of the sky to life.

"What makes Valravn so unique is how massive it is," says Pooch. "Our heaviest piece on a crane was 134,000 pounds, and we had to go 223 feet in the air with the load." That piece of steel weighs about the same as 11 fully grown elephants!

Cutting-edge coasters like Valravn take about three years to dream up and build. Even though Valravn just opened, newer, more goose-bump-inducing rides — at Cedar Point and other parks — are already in the works. What will they be like?

"I'm not at leisure to be able to tell you exactly what they are," says Pooch. Anxious thrill seekers will just have to wait and see. ■

COURTESY OF CEDAR POINT (3)

Career Gear

Want to work in sports? We've got a job for every type of student — and the tools to get you there.

If you like	You could get a job as a	Gear up with
MATH	**SABERMETRICIAN** Ever since the 2003 book *Moneyball* revealed how the Oakland Athletics were using math to get an advantage on their competitors, stat geeks have gone from the fringes of sports fandom to front offices. Paul DePodesta *(below right)*, who was one of the stars of the book, parlayed his economics degree from Harvard into a job as the assistant general manager with the A's. He used advanced statistics to find players who were undervalued by traditional scouting methods. After stints with the Dodgers, Mets, and Padres, he now works as an executive for the Cleveland Browns, bringing the same mathematical approach to football. 	 **TI-84 Plus Color Edition** *($149.99, education.ti.com)*, Crunch all those advanced stats — and whatever your math teacher throws at you — with this thin, light, and powerful graphing calculator.
ART	**SNEAKER DESIGNER** When the iconic red-and-black Air Jordan I debuted in 1985, sneakers became more than just basketball equipment. In an era of increasingly exotic designs and players having their own signature shoes, talented sneaker designers are in high demand. Take Dave Dombrow *(below)*, who worked on Steph Curry's signature shoes as Under Armour's senior vice president of design before moving to Nike in March. Then the much-derided Curry 2 Low "Chef" dropped. Perhaps not-so-coincidentally, Under Armour re-hired Dombrow as chief design officer a short time later. So if you've ever sketched out your own dream shoe in your notebook, keep practicing. You could one day be as sought-after as the superstars who will wear the shoes you design. 	 **Nike Kyrie 2** *($120, nike.com)*, Spark your sneaker design creativity — and work on your three-point game — with Kyrie Irving's signature sneaker. The Kyrie 2 has responsive, lighter-than-air cushioning and a uniquely designed strap for increased stability.

GETTY IMAGES (NOTEBOOK); PAUL J. BERESWILL/AP (DEPODESTA); COURTESY OF TEXAS INSTRUMENTS (TI-84); MARION CURTIS/STARPIX/AP (DOMBROW); COURTESY OF NIKE (SHOE)

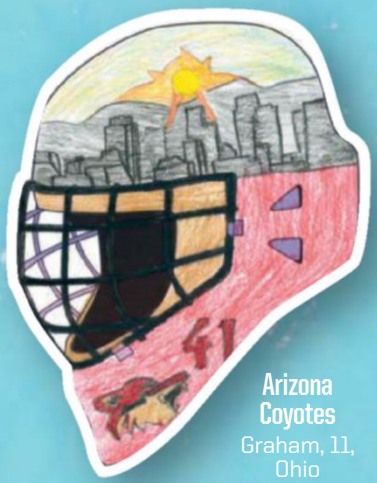
If you like	You could get a job as a	Gear up with
ENGLISH	**SPORTSWRITER** Despite many letters from readers speculating to the contrary, the humble writers of this magazine did receive some form of education. And if you're interested in writing compelling stories, sports journalism is a natural fit: The drama of athletics provides no shortage of heroes, villains, and underdogs. Just don't get any ideas about taking our gigs, O.K.?	 **Apple iPhone SE** *($399, apple.com)*, Journalists need to record interviews, take photos, shoot video, and file stories on the go — all of which is a breeze with Apple's latest iPhone.
HISTORY	**HALL OF FAME CURATOR** Sports history and American history are often one and the same. (Think of Jackie Robinson and Muhammad Ali.) So some of America's greatest museums are sports halls of fame. Want a job at which you maintain a collection of artifacts, like Babe Ruth's bat or the one Mike Moustakas used in the 2015 World Series *(left)*? Well, get those cotton gloves ready and keep studying. 	**Granite Gear Verendrye** *($79.99, granitegear.com)* This versatile, higher-capacity pack can haul all your hall-of-fame reference books and artifacts.
COMPUTER SCIENCE	**VIDEO GAME DESIGNER** Ever wonder how sports video games look more and more like the real thing? That's thanks to the designers, the people responsible for building the look and content of the titles. Game designers do everything from making sure that animated players look lifelike to ensuring that those digital players move like the real things. No matter what aspect of development they work in, designers have one thing in common: computer expertise. 	 ***Madden NFL 17*** *($59.99, easports.com)* There's no better place to find inspiration for your budding career in video games than by playing the latest, greatest, most-advanced edition of *Madden*.
MATH	**STADIUM ARCHITECT** These days, teams want stadiums that combine new and old. They want bells and whistles combined with the unique character of sport's classic cathedrals. (The Mets' Citi Field, for instance, boasts all of today's amenities while copying the facade of Brooklyn's long-lost Ebbets Field). With the boom in new construction, there's never been a better time to design a home for your favorite team. 	 **Microsoft Surface Pro 4** *($899, microsoft.com)* The Surface is not only a great tablet and laptop, it also becomes a great design tool with the Surface Pen.

NOAH GRAHAM/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (SPORTSWRITERS); COURTESY OF APPLE (IPOD); MIKE GROLL/AP (HALL OF FAME); COURTESY OF GRANITE GEAR (BACKPACK); EDWARD LINSMIER/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES (DEVELOPER); COURTESY OF EA SPORTS (MADDEN); HKS SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT (STADIUM); COURTESY OF MICORSOFT (SURFACE)

MAGIC MARKER MASKS

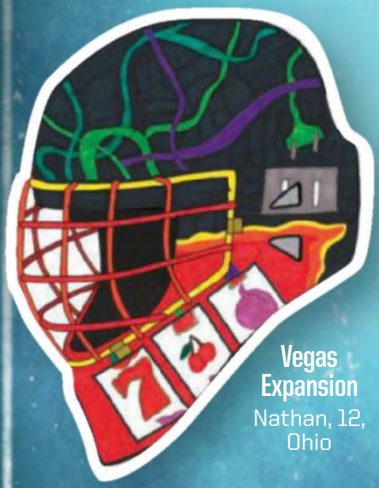
You sent us your best goalie helmet designs. Here are a few we'd like to see in the crease.

The Dragon-Slayer
Carter, 10, Minnesota



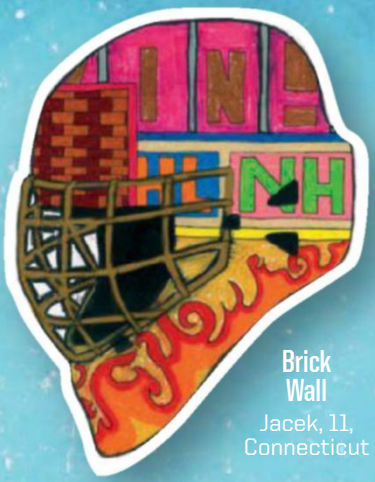
Arizona Coyotes
Graham, 11, Ohio

Blue Flames
Dahlia, 12, Georgia



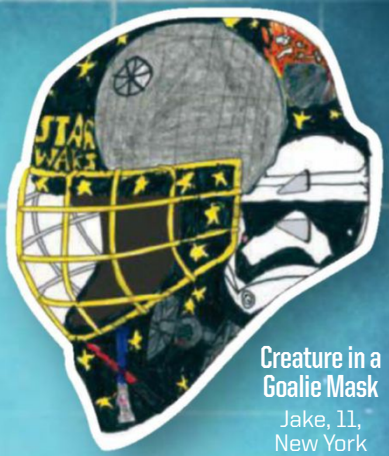
Vegas Expansion
Nathan, 12, Ohio

The X-Flyers (Not the Ex-Flyers)
Bret, 13, Delaware



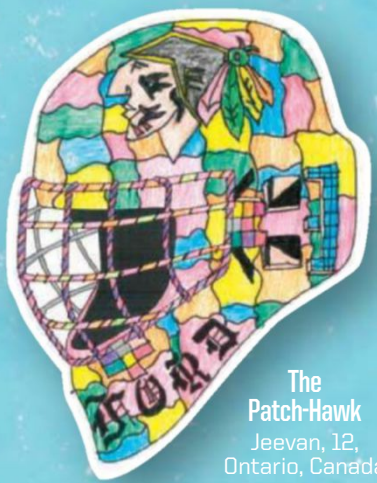
Brick Wall
Jacek, 11, Connecticut

Chess or Checkers?
Joey, 10, Massachusetts



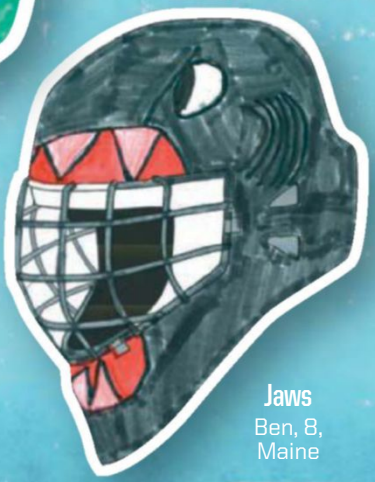
Creature in a Goalie Mask
Jake, 11, New York

Sgt. Netminder
Andrew, 9, Ontario, Canada

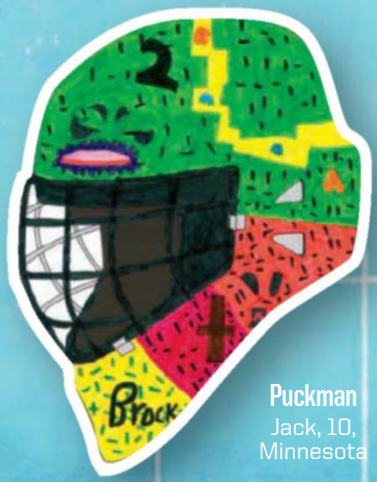


The Patch-Hawk
Jeevan, 12, Ontario, Canada

Grizzly Goalie
E.G., 7, Pennsylvania



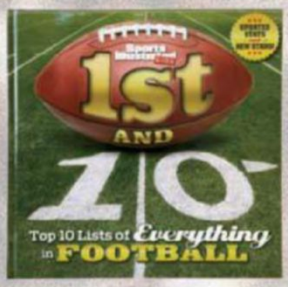
Jaws
Ben, 8, Maine



Puckman
Jack, 10, Minnesota

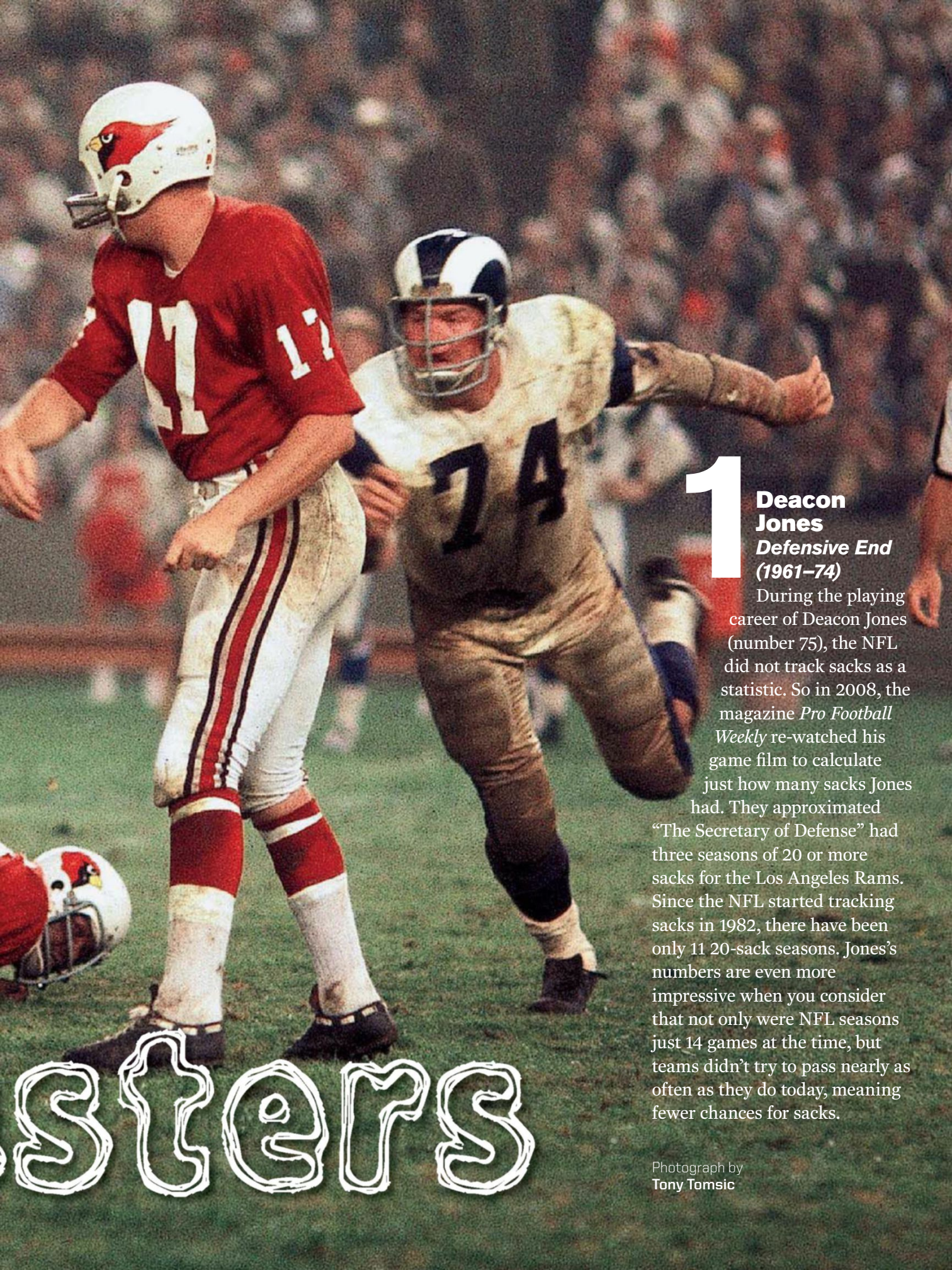
The Patriot
Jason, 11, Illinois

BOOK EXCERPT



From ***Sports Illustrated Kids 1st and 10: Top 10 Lists of Everything in Football***, updated to include the best players of today. Available in bookstores everywhere!

Top 10 Sack Ma



stters

1 Deacon Jones

Defensive End (1961–74)

During the playing career of Deacon Jones (number 75), the NFL did not track sacks as a statistic. So in 2008, the magazine *Pro Football Weekly* re-watched his game film to calculate just how many sacks Jones had. They approximated "The Secretary of Defense" had three seasons of 20 or more sacks for the Los Angeles Rams. Since the NFL started tracking sacks in 1982, there have been only 11 20-sack seasons. Jones's numbers are even more impressive when you consider that not only were NFL seasons just 14 games at the time, but teams didn't try to pass nearly as often as they do today, meaning fewer chances for sacks.

Photograph by
Tony Tomsic

2 Reggie White ***Defensive End (1985–2000)***
"The Minister of Defense" had a rare blend of power and quickness. He had 10 or more sacks in each of his first nine seasons, dominating for the Eagles and later the Packers.

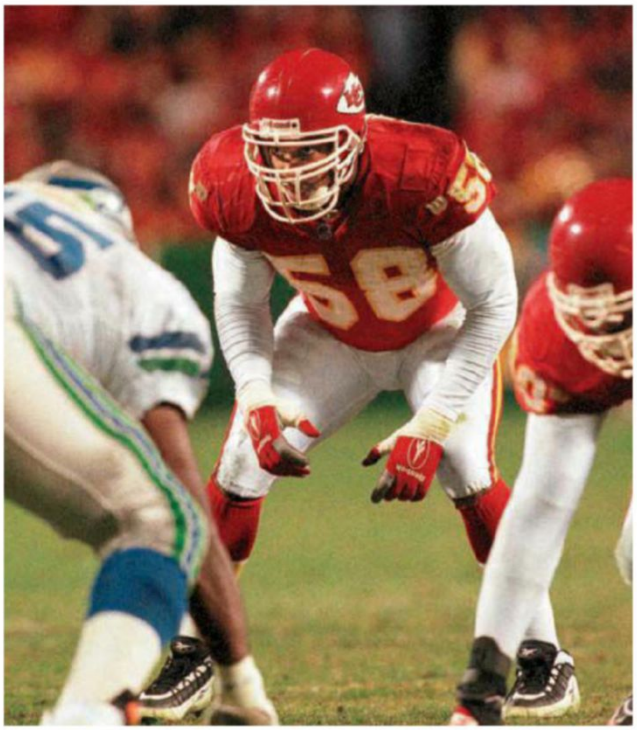
3 Bruce Smith ***Defensive End (1985–2003)***
Smith is the only man in NFL history to record 200 career sacks. He was the heart of a Buffalo Bills defense that went to four consecutive Super Bowls in the 1990s.

6 J.J. Watt ***Defensive End (2011–present)***
With a combination of size and athleticism never seen before, Watt is on pace to someday be the greatest pass rusher ever. He had 20-plus sacks in two of his first four years.

7 Gino Marchetti
Defensive End (1952–66)
The seven-time All-Pro played offensive line early in his career. It helped him learn to beat blockers. He led the D on a Colts team that won back-to-back titles in 1958 and '59.

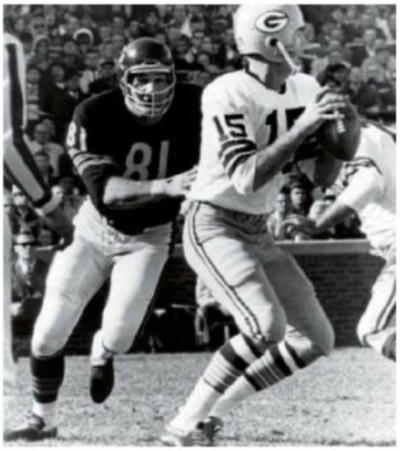
ALLEN KEE/GETTY IMAGES (WHITE); BILL FRAKES (SMITH); JIM MCISAAC/GETTY IMAGES (WATT); HY PESKIN (MARCHETTI)

4 Lawrence Taylor ***Linebacker (1981–93)***
Taylor had 20½ sacks for the Super Bowl champion 1986 Giants. The explosive edge rusher is the only player to be named AP Defensive Player of the Year three times.



5 Derrick Thomas ***Linebacker (1989–99)***
A nine-time Pro Bowler, Thomas had one of the greatest games ever. On November 11, 1990, he recorded seven sacks against the Seahawks, still a single-game record.

8 DeMarcus Ware
Linebacker (2005–present)
A four-time All-Pro with the Cowboys, Ware tied an NFL record by recording a sack in 10 straight games between 2007 and '08. He's still terrorizing QBs now, for Denver.



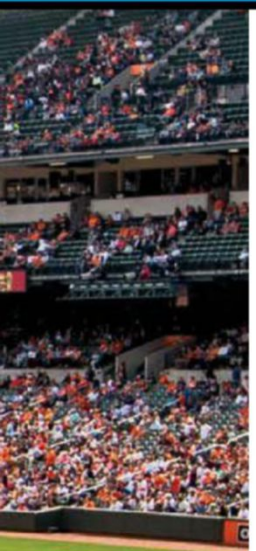
9 Doug Atkins
Defensive End (1953–69)
At 6' 8", Atkins was a monstrous presence on the Chicago Bears' defensive line. Overpowering blockers, he made the Pro Bowl eight times in his 12 seasons with the Bears.

10 Michael Strahan
Defensive End (1993–2007)
Strahan holds the single-season sack record, 22½ in 2001. He ended his career in style, with a sack of Tom Brady to help the Giants win Super Bowl XLII, his final game.

JOHN BIEVER (TAYLOR, THOMAS); JEFF ZELEVANSKY/GETTY IMAGES (WARE); NFL/AP (ATKINS); JOHN IACONO (STRAHAN)

NO BULL
With high-velocity relievers more prized than ever, the Mariners went another way, signing a varied group of hurlers like sidearming closer Cishek.

Undiscover



MLB +

ed MODEL

BY ALBERT CHEN

Photograph by **Simon Bruty**

DESPITE THE BEST EFFORTS OF SCOUTS AND STATISTICIANS, ***BULLPENS REMAIN BASEBALL'S GREATEST MYSTERY.*** WHY IS IT STILL SO HARD TO ASSEMBLE A RELIABLE GROUP OF RELIEVERS?

IN 2005, four years removed from his major league catching career, Scott Servais took a job as a Rockies scout. His boss and former teammate, Jerry Dipoto, Colorado's director of player development, was a former reliever with a reputation as something of a wonk — at the start of games Dipoto would pose a trivia question to his teammates in the bullpen — and as a young executive he had taken to statistical analysis as the Moneyball revolution was taking off.

Dipoto, who was a scout on the 2004 Red Sox championship team, had a mantra inspired by Bill James: *Do the work yourself so you can be truly sure*. Servais found out just how seriously Dipoto took this maxim as they ran studies on everything from the career arcs of Latin American players ("They sign earlier but don't get to the big leagues earlier," says Servais) to the similarities between winning major league franchises. ("The secret is clearly in player development," says Dipoto.) For one project that delved into the correlation between age and prospect projection — they found that for nine out of 10 prospects, you can gauge potential outcomes simply by focusing on their age relative to their level — Servais combed through every page of the *Baseball Encyclopedia* to scrape data on players with 2,500 at bats and starters who threw 500 innings. The study took 2½ years.

One baseball mystery, though, remained elusive. The year-to-year volatility in the performance of relief pitchers has long confounded teams, and after countless bullpen studies, Dipoto found himself coming back to one conclusion: "The idea that you're ever going to have a surefire way to create a bullpen is simply preposterous."

A decade later, Dipoto (who became general manager of the Mariners last September) and Servais (whom Dipoto picked as Seattle's new manager a month later) have reunited and are trying to turn around a franchise with the longest active playoff drought in the game. Dipoto overhauled the team — between October 19 and Opening Day, he moved 58 players on or off the 40-man roster — and aggressively addressed the team's biggest problem: the bullpen, which had collapsed to the sixth worst in baseball in 2015 after leading the majors in ERA the year before.

Dipoto did something bold for an era in which relievers have become more important and costlier than ever: He constructed an almost entirely new bullpen on the cheap, with a group of mostly unheralded, buy-low relievers. Among the Mariners' new relievers are a whippy sidearmer (closer Steve Cishek), a 38-year-old with a traditional overhand delivery (Joaquin Benoit), a big power arm with a Wiffle-ball slider (Tony Zych), a cutter-centric righthander (Nick Vincent), and a pair of righthanders whose fastballs top out in the high 80s but have still racked up swings and misses (Joel Peralta and Steve Johnson).

Nearly a third of the way into the season, the Mariners have had one of the best bullpens in all of baseball (with a 2.63 ERA, ranked fifth in the majors). Meanwhile, teams that invested unprecedented amounts in relief pitching

over the winter were stumbling. Servais's anonymous, soft-tossing relief staff had the look and feel of an overachieving unit enjoying a fluky first two months. Or could it be a new model of how to build an economical bullpen in 2016? Dipoto and Servais are tackling one of the most confounding enigmas in baseball.

LIKE ALL sports, baseball is a game of copycats: One team figures out a better way of doing something, and others follow. The success of Tony Gonzalez and Antonio Gates started a trend of NFL teams drafting basketball-playing tight ends. The Spurs won with radical resting strategies, and other NBA teams tried to do the same. After the Royals won back-to-back American League titles and a World Series last fall on the back of a historically good bullpen, it was inevitable that other teams would imitate their championship blueprint and try to overwhelm opposing teams with dominant relievers.

"The way the Royals did it — you had to take note," says Dipoto, who was GM of the 2014 Angels team that won an MLB-best 98 games but was swept by the Royals in the Division Series. "When you got into that bullpen, you knew that you were done because they're going to run out nine straight outs and you'll have a difficult time just fouling it off. That's a dejecting feeling."

Says Rangers assistant GM Thad Levine, "The perception that you could have a good but not great starting rotation and invest, relatively speaking, significantly less money on exceptional relievers in relation to good starters, and win that way: That led teams on a path they'd not gone down in recent years. In the past, teams would start conversations asking what starters would be available, and now the first thing they would ask you about was your setup man."

This past off-season saw a flurry of trades and signings confirming that shutdown relievers are more coveted than ever. Teams retained their 2015 closers yet still paid a premium for an additional elite arm: The Yankees (Aroldis Chapman), Red Sox (Craig Kimbrel), Astros (Ken Giles), Blue Jays (Drew Storen), Rangers (Tom Wilhelmsen), and Royals (Joakim Soria) all had closers in place but still added a pitcher who either finished last season as his team's closer or led his team in saves.

With some of the most data-driven organizations taking this approach, the old sabermetric tenet about bullpens — Don't pay big for relievers because they're unreliable and effectively interchangeable — was lit on fire. The Astros dealt away five players (including 23-year-old starter Vincent Velasquez and the No. 1 overall pick from 2013, starter Mark Appel) to get Giles, the Phillies' closer last year. The prices teams paid for setup men was nearly as jaw-dropping: The Cubs signed Trevor Cahill, who had been released in June, for $4.25 million; the Orioles re-signed Darren O'Day for $31 million over four years; the small-market A's shelled out for John Axford ($10 million over two years) as well as Ryan Madson (a three-year, $22 million deal).

"Billy is as interested in buying movable assets as anything — to take a high-demand player who he'll flip to get high-value, long-term assets," says a National League GM of Oakland executive VP Billy Beane. "So [the Madson and Axford deals] were a validation of this trend: They saw the market and acted accordingly."

This was not merely the Royals effect: Declining offense has put a premium on run prevention, and teams are adapting to the high cost of starting pitching. Many managers, swayed by statistical evidence that starters facing a lineup for the third time in a game perform dramatically worse, are also relying on their relievers more than ever: Starting pitchers logged more starts of less than six innings last season than in any other.

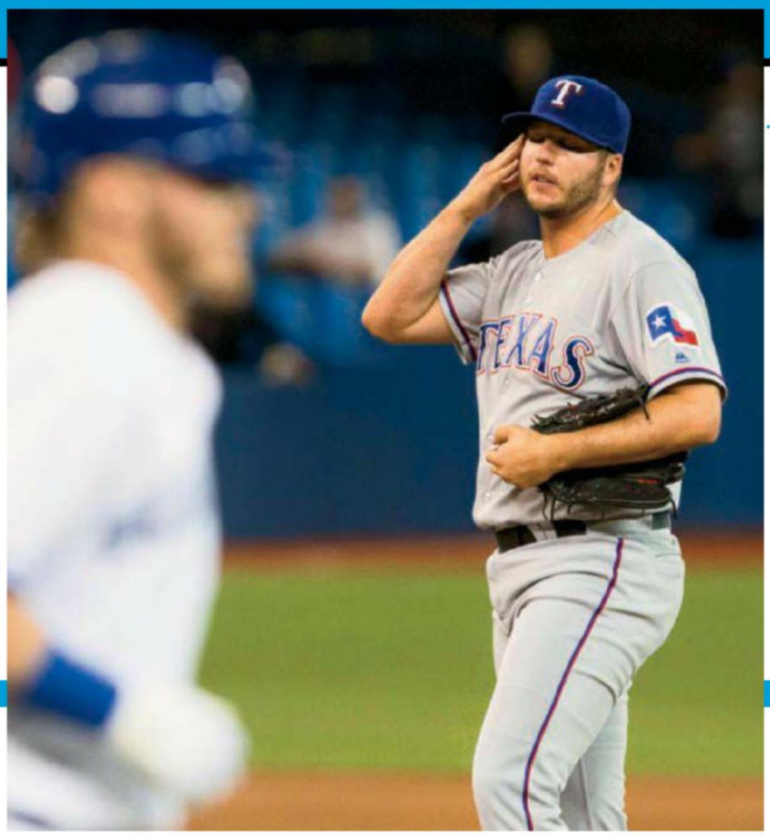
Bullpens are volatile — just ask the teams who've seen the biggest swings in reliever ERA from last year to this year.

	2015 ERA	2016 ERA
MARINERS	4.15	2.63
REDS	3.96	6.47
PIRATES	2.67	4.33
RANGERS	4.12	5.43

The problem with sports trends: Teams will overreact to what worked and what seemed innovative, and go so far in the opposite direction that the strategy becomes unprofitable. For now, at least, it looks like the Astros bought high on Giles, who in '14 and '15 was one of the game's most dominant relievers, with a combined 1.56 ERA. Giles allowed more home runs (four) over the season's first seven weeks than he did over the previous two seasons combined (three). Meanwhile, Velasquez has been one of the season's breakout stars for Philadelphia.

"There's a greater risk associated with relievers — the predictive measures are less reliable," says Vince Gennaro, president of the Society for American Baseball Research and an analytics consultant to

FROM TOP: ELAINE THOMPSON/AP; VINCENT LAFORET/GETTY IMAGES; SIMON BRUTY



TEXAS STRANGERS
While Dipoto, a former reliever himself (top left), overhauled Seattle's pen, the Rangers kept a successful group intact – and have seen drop-offs from, among others, now-demoted closer Tolleson (above).

CHRIS YOUNG/THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP

MLB teams. "Conceptually, it should be getting easier now that we have new tools: spin rate and pitch movement, which may be able to correlate with success. But relievers will always be far less predictable than starting pitchers, simply because of the amount of work they get. An average reliever is going to pitch roughly a third as much as a starting pitcher. Evaluating a reliever on a season's results is the equivalent of evaluating a [starter] on two months' work. There's a case to be made that if a reliever has a high plateau and has come off that, it could be that something is going to regress back from that high level."

The AL West is Exhibit A in the volatility of bullpens, and not just because of Seattle's dramatic improvement. In the second half of last year, the Rangers' bullpen helped carry Texas to a surprising division crown. Texas went into the season with virtually that same unit in place — and results have been markedly different: Through May 22, the team had lost a major-league-high six times in walk-off fashion, and ranked last in the AL in bullpen ERA: 5.43. Shawn Tolleson, who saved 35 games last year, lost the closer job after blowing his fourth save. "This offseason we actually felt like we had a good bullpen," says Levine. "And here we are, thinking we may need to address it again. But we can't lose sight of our strategic perspective: Outside of the Joe Nathan commitment we made [a $14.75 million two-year deal in 2012], we haven't allocated a major multiyear deal to a relief pitcher. By and large we've been more on the side of selling high on relievers, rather than investing at the height, just because of the volatility."

Some in the industry believe that relievers are actually more volatile now for the same reasons they are more dominant than ever. "There are so many more who are wired for the short-burst, high velocity," says Dipoto. "We're really exploring new areas with bullpens that have never been explored before. What I might have learned 15 years ago in researching bullpens probably isn't applicable today because of how the game has changed, because of how the back-end reliever has evolved. There's so much velocity, so many specialty pitchers, so much nuance that we have to adapt to."

SEATTLE'S BULLPEN is certainly not the game's most intimidating, but it may be the most interesting. Through the early part of the season it was one of the AL's softest-tossing units, yet it was still near the top in strikeouts. In his three years with the Angels, Dipoto earned a reputation for building strong bullpens on the fly, and he has taken his philosophy to Seattle: "It's trying to create the deepest group you can create. You want different options, you want different looks. [This winter] while everyone else was focused on guys throwing 100, we went to the point in the market where we found value in the guys who threw 90 instead of 100 and did it in a unique way."

New tracking technology has allowed analytics-driven organizations like the Mariners to be more creative in their player evaluations. For instance, in the cases of Peralta and Johnson, the Mariners looked past velocity and saw the exceptional spin rates on their fastballs, using the TrackMan video system that has been installed at some ballparks over the last few years. Spin rate — the number of times the baseball rotates on the way to the plate — has become valuable in player evaluation: Research shows that average fastball spin has a higher correlation to swinging strike rate than average fastball velocity. "Johnson's fastball is 88, and somehow they miss it," says Servais, who receives a report on spin rates every week.

The unpredictability of a player like Johnson — a lightly regarded reliever who was designated for assignment by the Orioles over the offseason and released during spring training by the Rangers before the Mariners signed him in March — is also the reason Texas hopes that things will soon turn around for Tolleson and the rest of their bullpen. And it's why Dipoto and Servais know that as good as their relievers have been so far, they are in for their own struggles. The pair may look like they have the answers one day, but the next, everything can change — that is the mysterious nature of bullpens.

For now, Dipoto is certain only of this: "If you think you've got it figured out, you probably don't." □

END ZONE

WHAT'S THE CALL?

Illustrations by
Sean Tiffany

1

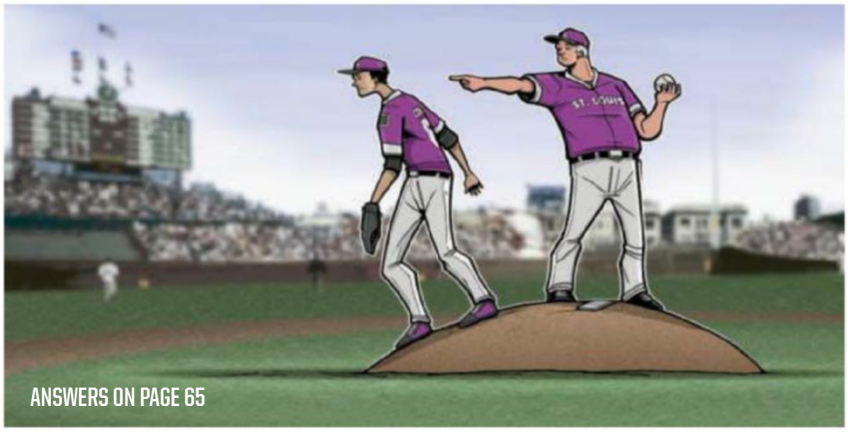
A TRIP DOWN THE RUNWAY

Talisha Sherman moves down the runway during her final javelin attempt at a track and field meet. Just before she reaches the end of the runway, a bird swoops down and flies past her face. Sherman is so startled that she trips. When Sherman gets up, she makes her way back to the beginning of the runway to start her attempt again. Opponents argue that she cannot make any more attempts. You're the official. Does Sherman get another shot?

2

LOST AND NOT FOUND

Bert Perry loses his ball in tall grass during a golf tournament. After seven minutes, the ball is still nowhere to be found. You're the official. Does Perry get a penalty?



ANSWERS ON PAGE 65

3

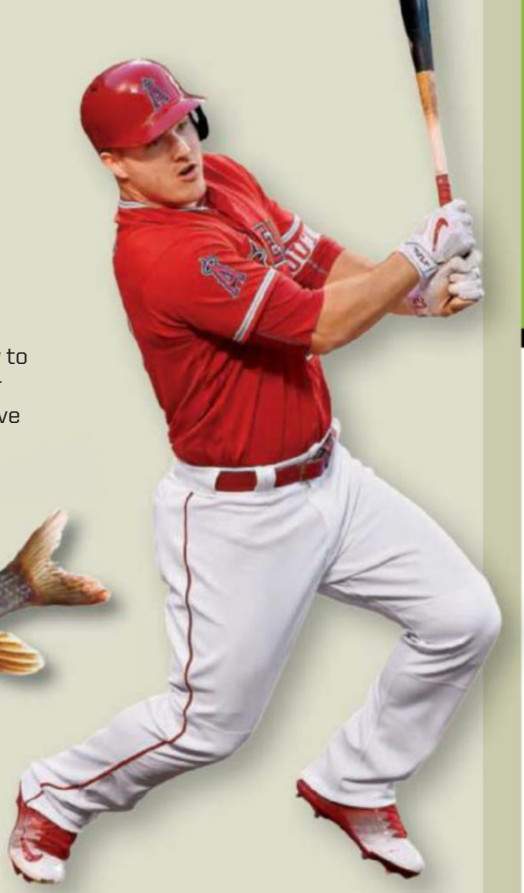
POSITION CHANGE?

With one out in the bottom of the seventh inning, St. Louis Lefties pitcher Jalen Conyers is taken off the mound during a game against the Roanoke Rapids Righties. The Lefties' manager moves Conyers to rightfield. The Righties argue that Conyers cannot play any other position, besides pitcher, to finish the inning. You're the umpire. Are the Righties correct?

GAMES

TASTY NAMES

Some athletes have names that match foods. Use the clues below to figure out the identity of four star athletes with tasty monikers. We've done the first one for you.



EXAMPLE: The Los Angeles outfielder is an Angel with a fishy name.

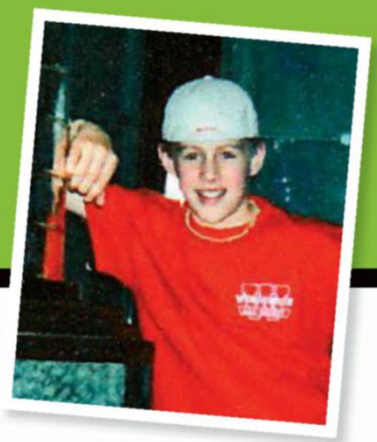
MIKE TROUT (right)

1 A power forward for the Cleveland Cavaliers, this 10-year NBA veteran pairs well with a burger.

3 He's a three-time Pro-Bowler who last played with the Chicago Bears. He's also a baked good.

2 When you want to sautee or roast these colorful fruits, call on this Green Bay Packers outside linebacker.

4 He's a defensive end for the Arizona Cardinals and a frozen dairy dessert.



MYSTERY ATHLETE

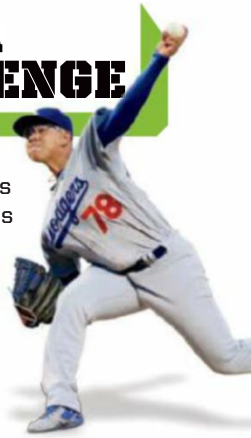
CLUE #1 The Mystery Athlete is a sixth-year defensive end for the Houston Texans.

CLUE #2 A two-time league leader in sacks (2012, '15), the Mystery Athlete has been to the Pro Bowl four straight years ('12–'15).

CLUE #3 The Mystery Athlete played football at the University of Wisconsin. His youngest brother, a fullback, also played for the Badgers and was drafted by the San Diego Chargers this year.

THE MYSTERY ATHLETE IS:

TRIVIA CHALLENGE



Los Angeles Dodgers lefthander Julio Urias *(right)* pitched his first MLB game at 19 years old in May. Who was the last pitcher to make his debut at 19?

A. Noah Syndergaard
B. CC Sabathia
C. Felix Hernandez

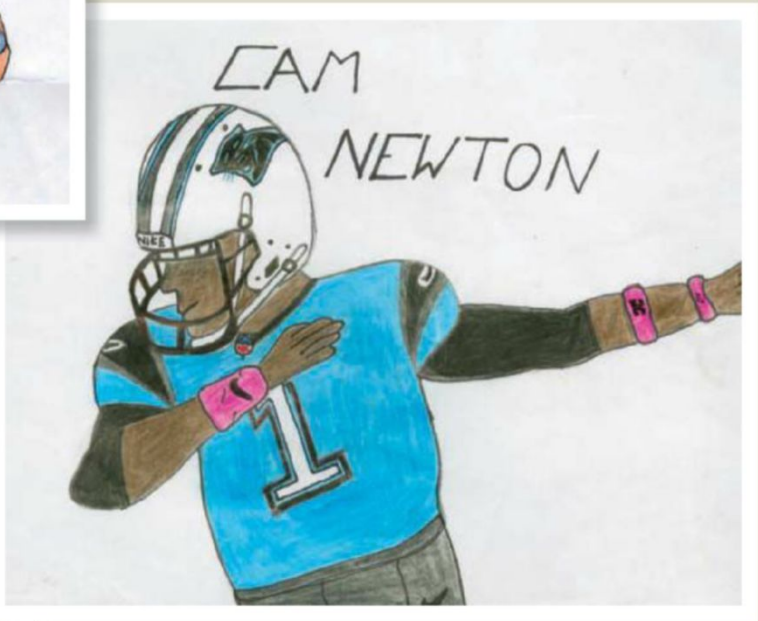
LISA BLUMENFELD/GETTY IMAGES (TROUT); DAVIES AND STARR/GETTY IMAGES (FISH); ISTOCKPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES (FRY); SIMON PASK/GETTY IMAGES (BREAD); TOM GRILL/GETTY IMAGES (FRUIT); WENDY'S (FROSTY); AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES (URIAS)

ART GALLERY

Carli Lloyd
Brianne, 13, Minnesota

Mike Trout
Luke, 11, Oregon

Cam Newton
Teddy, 11, Pennsylvania



Kristaps Porzingis
Logan, 12, Pennsylvania

Send your drawings to:
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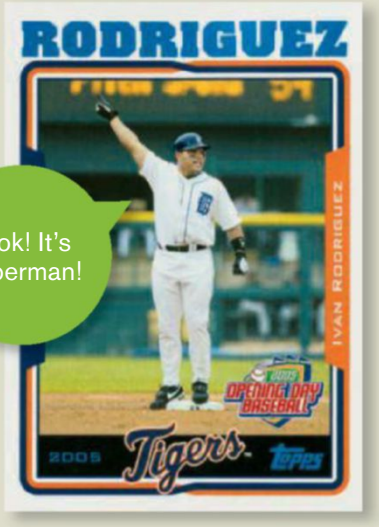
7th Floor, New York, NY 10281.
Please include your name, address, date of birth, and the name of the athlete.

Send your cards to: **COMIC CARDS**, SI Kids, 225 Liberty Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10281. Please include your name, address, and date of birth.

COMIC CARDS

I can see my house from up here!

Jena, 12, Florida

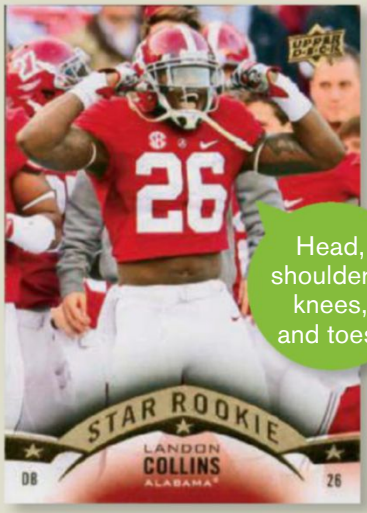


Look! It's Superman!

Malachi, 11, New York

If this tennis thing doesn't work out, I could always become a ballerina!

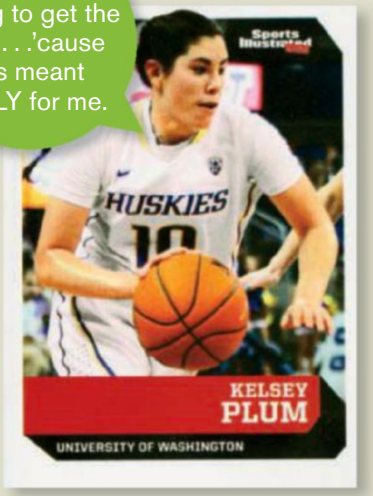
Declan, 11, California



Head, shoulders, knees, and toes!

Justin, 11, Michigan

You're not going to get the ball . . .'cause it's meant ONLY for me.



Aadi, 12, Illinois

ANSWERS

- **What's the Call?** (page 62)

1. It's a judgment call. The head official can give Sherman another throw if he or she feels the bird contributed to distracting her. If given another chance, Sherman has one minute to complete the throw.
2. Yes, Perry's ball was considered lost once he had spent five minutes searching for it. He is penalized one stroke. He must return to the spot where he played his last stroke and continue from there.
3. It is legal for the pitcher to take a defensive position. If it's the manager's second trip to the mound to visit the same pitcher that inning, however, then the pitcher must be removed from the game and cannot assume a defensive position.

- **Tasty Names** (page 63)

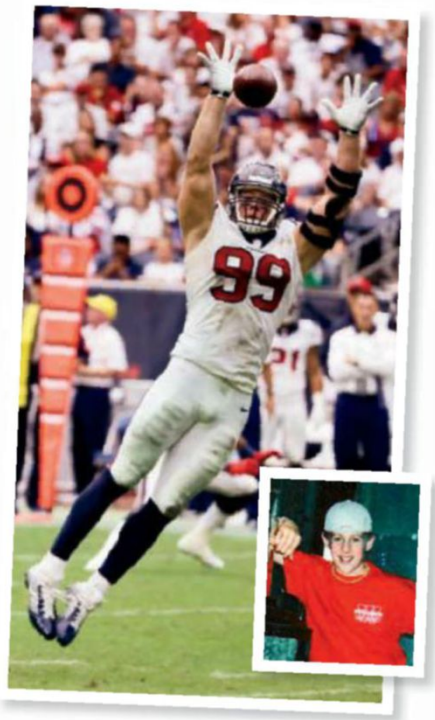
1. Channing Frye
2. Antrel Rolle
3. Julius Peppers
4. Frostee Rucker

- **Trivia** (page 63)

C. Felix Hernandez

- **Mystery Athlete** (page 63)

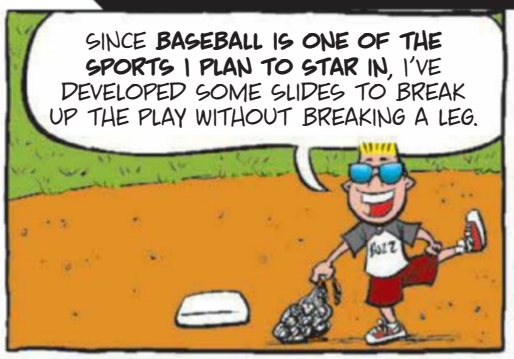
J.J. Watt, defensive end, Houston Texans



DAVID J. PHILLIP/AP (WATT ACTION); COURTESY OF THE WATT FAMILY (WATT AS A KID)

BUZZ BEAMER

By Bill Hinds



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2016 Summer Olympics Preview

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Ready for Rio!

RIO 2016

Summer Olympics Preview

4 LET THE GAMES BEGIN The Olympics are here — 16 fantastic days in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, that kick off with the opening ceremony and lighting of the flame.

6 THE SPORTS From archery to wrestling, here's all you need to know about every game in the Games.

14 BUZZ BEAMER Our own adventurous, mischievous Buzz tried his hand at some Olympic events. The results were not so golden.

16 EYES ON THE PRIZE The lowdown on the one souvenir every competitor wants to come home with: an Olympic medal.

18 MEET TEAM USA Get to know these Americans who hope to dominate at the Olympics and the Paralympics.

30 GLOBAL POWERS Here's a geographic look at who dominates what.

32 BEYOND THE GOLD These stories of sportsmanship, empowerment, and heroism show the Olympics are about more than winning.

34 WATCH GUIDE Ready to cheer on your favorite athletes? Use our handy schedule to ensure that you don't miss a minute of the action from Rio. Plus, make your own predictions to see if you deserve a medal too.

40 MASCOT MASHUP Meet Tom, the Paralympic mascot, and Vinicius, the Olympic mascot, who represent Brazil's flora and fauna. Then imagine what the mascot would look like if the Olympics were held in *your* hometown. Send us your ideas, and we'll feature the best in a future issue!

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COVER
Simon Bruty (Biles, Burroughs, Eaton, Franklin);
Michael J. LeBrecht II (Durant)
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JOHN W. MCDONOUGH (PHOTOGRAPH); ILLUSTRATION BY BILL HINDS

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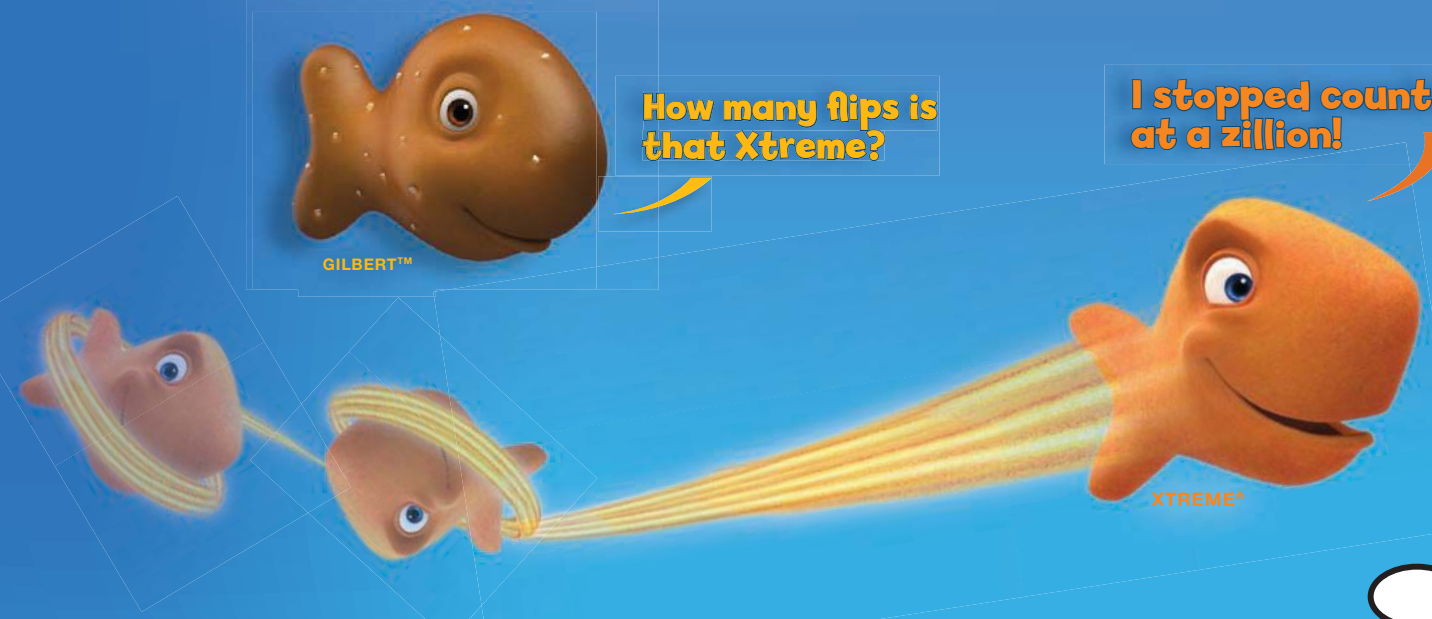

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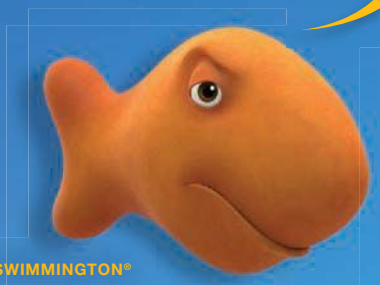

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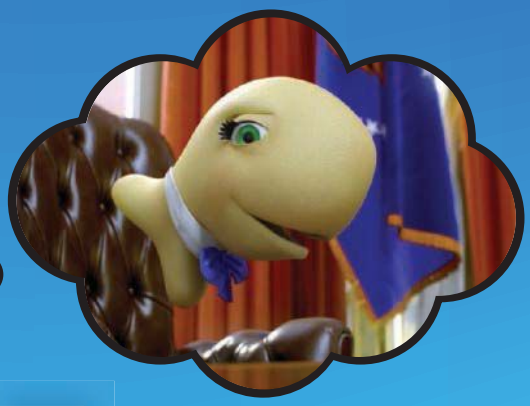

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The Summer Olympics are here — 16 fantastic days in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, that kick off with the lighting of the ceremonial flame.

LET THE GAM

Fired Up!

The Olympics originated in ancient Greece, where fire was considered sacred. So a flame was kept burning during the Games. That tradition remains to this day. Months before the Olympics begin, a torch is lit in Greece using the sun's rays. The torch then embarks on a journey to the host nation, and its flame is used to light the Olympic cauldron in a ceremony that officially opens the Games.

Rio Relay

The flame for the Rio Games was lit on April 21. After a week in Greece, it was flown to Switzerland for a visit to the Olympic Museum. (The torch got its very own seat on the private plane.) Then it was on to Brazil, where 12,000 runners were enlisted to take part in the 95-day, 22,000-mile relay that took the torch to 300 towns and cities before its arrival at the Maracanã Stadium in Rio.

The Torch

The design used for this relay features segments that expand when the flame is passed. (The floating effect is meant to symbolize the work of the runners.) The Brazilian flag's colors are present: yellow (for the sun), blue (for the sea), green (for the mountains), and white (for the sky). The body of the torch is covered in small triangles that represent Olympic ideals of excellence, friendship, and respect.

MES BEGIN

The Lighter Side

One of the mysteries of each Olympics is who will light the flame during the opening ceremony. It is often a famous athlete who is a native of the host country. (For instance, Muhammad Ali opened the 1996 Games in Atlanta.) But not always. At the last Summer Games, in London *(above)*, the cauldron was lit by seven aspiring young athletes who had been nominated by former British Olympic heroes.

Enduring Flame

One of the fundamental rules of the relay is to make sure the torch isn't extinguished on its journey. That's not always easy. In 2000, it was taken underwater at the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. (Scientists spent nine months developing a flame that would burn in water. The technology is similar to a flare.) The flame also survived snow on several occasions, including a trip to the North Pole in 2014.

Wild Wildlife

The 1956 Olympics were held in Melbourne, Australia — except for the equestrian events, which took place in Switzerland. When the torch made its way to that country, it did so entirely on horseback. And before the 1996 Games in Atlanta, a portion of the torch relay paid tribute to the Pony Express, so horses were used again. In 2000, the flame was transported across the Australian desert by camel.

CHRIS MCGRATH/GETTY IMAGES (LONDON); 2016 RIO (RIO RELAY); GREG GARAY/AP (2000 RELAY)

THE SPORTS

Everything you need to know about every game in the Games

ARCHERY

Archery is one of the oldest sports in the world, and, if *The Hunger Games* is to be believed, it will be around for quite some time. In the Olympics, competitors have 40 seconds to shoot six arrows at a 4.8-inch bull's-eye 230 feet away. (That's more than half a football field!) Scores range from 10 for a bull's-eye to one for the outermost ring on the four-foot target.

DICTIONARY

Fletching: The feathers on the back of an arrow, which help it fly straight.

Quiver: The large, holster-like container in which the archer keeps arrows.

Nock: The notch in the back of the arrow that connects it to the string.

Robin Hood: When a competitor's arrow splits an arrow that is already in the target.

BADMINTON

You might know it from backyard cookouts, but the Olympic version of the game will blow you away. The shuttlecock (also known as the birdie) can travel at speeds of up to 248 miles per hour, and there can be more than two shots per second during a rally.

RECORD BOOK

In 1996, Poul-Erik Høyer Larsen of Denmark became the only athlete from outside of Asia to win a gold medal in badminton, which has been an Olympic sport since 1992.

BASKETBALL

The Olympic hoops tournament used to be contested primarily by college players and pros from outside of the NBA. That changed in 1992, when NBA players were permitted, giving birth to the Dream Teams — the name given to the U.S. squads loaded with the game's stars (including Kevin Durant, *above*, this year).

RECORD BOOK

The United States won its first 62 games over eight Olympics before being beaten controversially at the buzzer by the Soviet Union in the 1972 gold medal game.

BEACH VOLLEYBALL

The two-on-two tournaments (one for men and one for women) will take place on Copacabana beach, one of the most famous waterfronts in the world. (Its annual New Year's Eve fireworks show attracts upwards of two million people.) Folks on the beach like to get a little wild, so this should be a fun event to watch.

DICTIONARY

Float serve: A high-arcing serve that is hit with no spin, so it flutters like a knuckleball.

Cut shot: An angled shot at the net, used instead of a hard spike.

Husband-and-wife: A play in which the two players let the ball drop between them because of a failure to communicate.

BOXING

The longtime Olympic sport has been plagued with controversial judging decisions. In Rio, there will be a new system. Gone is the computerized punch counter that had been in use. Now five human judges will score each round. A computer randomly picks three judges' scorecards, which are used to determine the winner.

RULE BOOK

Along with wrestling, boxing is one of two Olympic sports in which competitors must be amateurs (which means they aren't paid to be fighters). As a result, most Olympians compete once and then turn pro. But there are exceptions, most notably Cuban heavyweights Teófilo Stevenson and Félix Savón, who each won three gold medals in a row.

CANOE AND KAYAK

Boats race against each other under calm conditions (called flatwater) and against the clock on a course with lots of waves (called whitewater, *above*). So what's the difference between a canoe and a kayak? A kayak is lighter and narrower.

RULE BOOK

In whitewater, competitors have to pass through a series of gates. If a racer touches a gate, it's a two-second penalty. If he or she misses a gate altogether, it costs the athlete 50 seconds.

RYAN MCVAY/GETTY IMAGES (BULL'S-EYE); LIONSGATE/EVERETT COLLECTION (HUNGER GAMES); IMAGE SOURCE/GETTY IMAGES (SHUTTLECOCK); CHRISTIAN PETERSEN/GETTY IMAGES (DURANT); ISTOCKPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES (BEACH); JOHN BIEVER (CANOE)

CYCLING

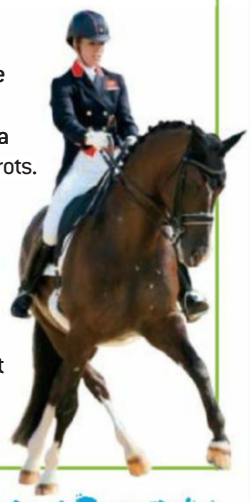
Four different types of competitions are held: track, road, mountain biking, and BMX. In all four cases riders are racing. There are no style points for tricks, even in BMX *(above)*, which includes obstacles and big jumps.

RECORD BOOK

When East Germany's Christa Luding-Rothenburger won a silver medal in sprint cycling at the 1988 Games, she became the only Olympian to win a medal in the Winter and Summer Olympics in the same year. (She had won a speed skating silver seven months earlier.) It's unlikely the feat will ever be matched, because the Winter and Summer Games no longer take place in the same year.

EQUESTRIAN

Equestrian refers to horseback events. The most interesting (or strangest) is called dressage. Riders put their horses through a series of movements, such as steps and trots. It is sometimes referred to as horse ballet.



RULE BOOK

In the jumping competition, riders are assessed penalty points for a variety of faults, including their horses hitting an obstacle or refusing a jump. The winner isn't always the rider who completes the course fastest; it's the one with the fewest faults.

DIVING

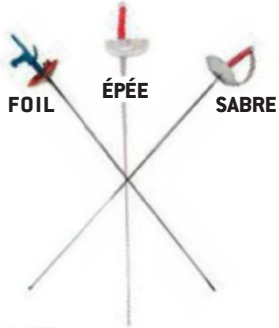
Medals are awarded in the springboard (which is about 10 feet above the water) and the platform (which is more than 30 feet up). Divers are given a score between zero and 10; their scores are then multiplied by the degree of difficulty, which rewards athletes for pulling off tougher dives.

RECORD BOOK

In 2008, Matthew Mitcham of Australia *(above)* came closer than any diver to getting a perfect score. He got 10s from four of the seven judges on his final attempt in the platform competition. His dive required him to jump backward then do two-and-a-half flips and two-and-a-half twists. He barely made a splash when he entered the water, and the dive earned him the gold.

FENCING

This is good ol' sword fighting, in which competitors try to pick up points by touching their opponents with the tip of their weapons.



DICTIONARY

Piste: Also called "the strip," it's the area on which bouts are contested. It's 46 feet long and less than five feet wide.

Lunge: A basic attack move in which the front leg moves forward, while the back leg remains in place and straightens out.

Parry: To block an opponent's blade.

Fleche: A short running attack.

FIELD HOCKEY

If a hockey rink melted, you'd end up with something like field hockey (but with 11 players per side, shoes instead of skates — and a lot fewer bushy beards). The sport is played on artificial turf that has been watered down so that the ball sticks to it better. There are 12-team tournaments for men and women.

GOLF

Absent from the Olympics for 112 years, golf returns with men's and women's competitions at Reserva Marapendi, a course designed and built for these Games.

RECORD BOOK

In 1900, Margaret Abbott *(above)* became the first American woman to win a gold medal. Only she never knew it. She didn't actually get a medal — she got a bowl.

And the Olympics weren't nearly as big a deal back then. Abbott competed because she just happened to be in Paris studying under famous artists Edgar Degas (*above,* one of his paintings) and Auguste Rodin. She died not knowing her place in history; her family found out she was America's first female Olympic champ years later.

GYMNASTICS

Tumbling and jumping and flipping — oh, my! Gymnasts compete in teams as well as individually. There are six apparatus events for men and four for women.

DICTIONARY

Stick the landing: To dismount from an apparatus (such as the balance beam or parallel bars) without taking any steps upon hitting the ground. If a gymnast has to take a step, he or she has points deducted.

Iron cross: A very difficult position on the rings *(above)*, in which a gymnast holds himself up with his arms straight out to the side.

RULE BOOK

Goals can only be scored on shots taken inside the shooting circle (also known as the D), which is a 16-yard arc around the net.

HANDBALL

Everyone knows a wise guy who yells, "Pick up the ball" at soccer games. Well, if the players listened to him they'd be playing handball, which is a combination of basketball and soccer. Teams of seven pass and dribble the ball and then try to throw it past the goalie into the net.

RECORD BOOK

In 2008, Iceland nearly pulled off a massive upset, falling to France 28–23 in the gold medal match. It was just the tiny country's fourth Olympic medal — and the only one in a team sport.

JUDO

The name of this Japanese martial art translates to "the gentle way." And while it still involves athletes trying to force each other into submission, there is no kicking, punching, or touching of the face. Grapplers try to throw their opponents to the ground, immobilize them, or get them to tap out with a chokehold or armlock.

RECORD BOOK

Ricardo Blas Jr. *(below right)* of Guam failed to medal at the 2012 Games, but he still made history. At 481 pounds, Blas (who is nicknamed the Little Mountain) became the heaviest Olympian in modern history.

ROBERT BECK (BMX); ALEX LIVESEY/GETTY IMAGES (DRESSAGE); JOHN BIEVER (MITCHAM); KOHJIRO KINNO (FIELD HOCKEY); PETER READ MILLER (GYMANST); QUINN ROONEY/GETTY IMAGES (JUDO); LAURENT LECAT/ELECTA/MONDADORI/GETTY IMAGES (DEGAS)

MARATHON SWIMMING

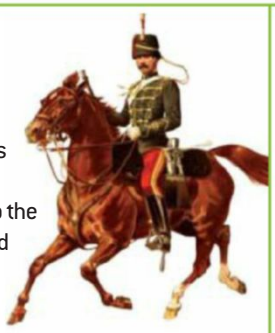
Instead of a pool, the Atlantic Ocean — off of Copacabana beach — is the site of this 10-kilometer race. The event takes nearly two hours to complete, but there can still be a tight finish. In 2012, the winning margin in the women's race was two-fifths of a second.

DICTIONARY

Choppy: When the wind causes waves in the water, making it tough to swim.

MODERN PENTATHLON

This sport is based on the five skills a man needed to be a cavalry soldier (one who serves on horseback). The idea is that he is given a message to deliver on horseback, then has to defend himself with a sword and a gun when he loses the horse, then has to swim and run to complete his mission. So the five events are equestrian, fencing, shooting, swimming, and cross-country.



RECORD BOOK

Boris Onischenko won the 1972 silver medal, but his victory was tainted. Why? In 1976, he was found to have a device in his fencing sword that allowed him to score a hit when he pushed a button. He was disqualified.

RUGBY SEVENS

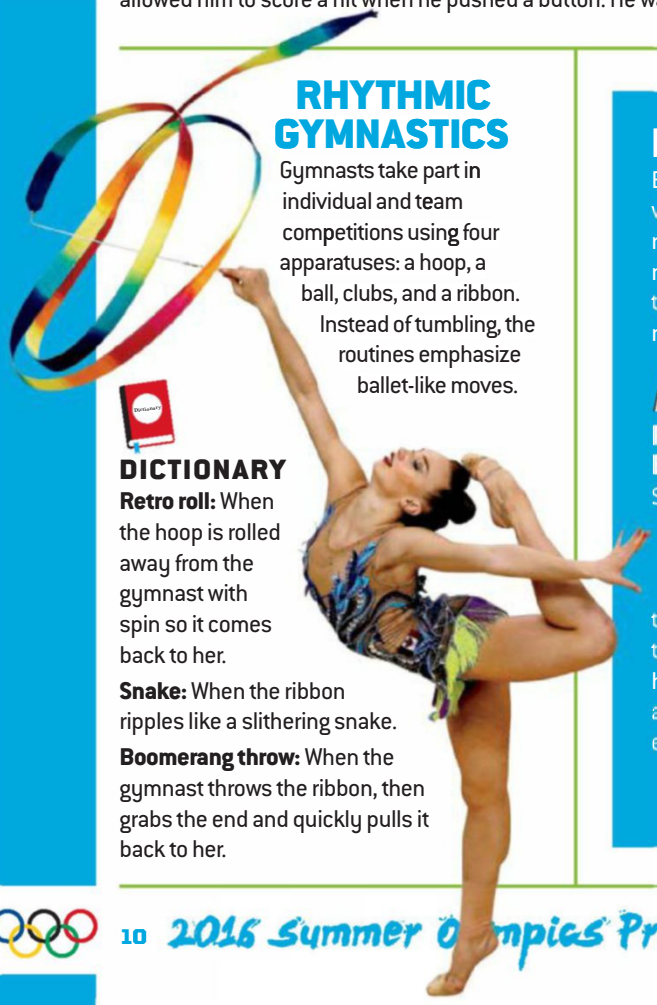
Seven-person rugby is making its Olympic debut. (Fifteen-man teams competed until 1924). The sport is fast and furious. It can look like teams are running the football option nonstop (lots of pitching the ball) as they attempt to score a try (which is similar to a touchdown).

RULE BOOK

When a player commits an infraction that results in a yellow card, he is sent to the "sin bin," where he has to remain for two minutes while his team plays shorthanded.

RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS

Gymnasts take part in individual and team competitions using four apparatuses: a hoop, a ball, clubs, and a ribbon. Instead of tumbling, the routines emphasize ballet-like moves.



DICTIONARY

Retro roll: When the hoop is rolled away from the gymnast with spin so it comes back to her.

Snake: When the ribbon ripples like a slithering snake.

Boomerang throw: When the gymnast throws the ribbon, then grabs the end and quickly pulls it back to her.

ROWING

Boat and crew sizes vary, but all of the races are 2,000 meters, requiring more than 40 strokes per minute.

RECORD BOOK

Steve Redgrave of England won a gold medal at every Olympics from 1984 through 2000. He is the only person to have won gold medals at five Games in an endurance sport.

SAILING

Sailors will be at the mercy of the wind in Guanabara Bay. Races are held in a variety of boat sizes. In the past, boats have been as big as 20 metric tons. Now, the smallest boat (not counting the sailboard class) weighs just 59 kilograms, or about 130 pounds.

DICTIONARY

Dinghy: The simplest, smallest type of boat.

Port: The left side of a boat (when facing the front).

Starboard: The right side of a boat.

SHOOTING

Marksmen shoot at targets in the rifle and pistol disciplines. In the skeet and trap competitions, shooters take aim at clay targets with shotguns.

RECORD BOOK

The oldest competitor in Olympic history is shooter Oscar Swahn of Sweden, who competed at age 72 in 1920. Swahn won a silver medal in the running deer team event (in which shooters tried to hit a moving deer-shaped target).

SOCCER

The host nation has won more World Cups (five) than any other country. But Brazil has never captured an Olympic gold medal. The Brazilians came close in 2012, winning their first five games before falling to Mexico in the final. In the women's tournament, watch the United States. The U.S. has won the last three gold medals.

RULE BOOK

Participants in the men's tournament must be under the age of 23, but three overage players are allowed per team. The women's teams have no age restriction.

SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING

One of two sports in which men don't compete, synchronized swimming consists of pairs and teams of nine, who perform choreographed routines set to music. (If you're wondering how they hear the music when their heads are underwater: There are speakers in the pool.)

DICTIONARY

Boost: A move in which the swimmer rises out of the water headfirst, trying to get as much of her body above the surface as possible.

Deck work: The moves that swimmers perform poolisde before they jump into the water.

Eggbeater: A movement of the legs that keeps the upper body straight and leaves the arms free.

Spin: The act of rotating one's body while upside down with the head under the water.

SWIMMING

Medals will be awarded in a total of 32 events, each of which is contested in one of four strokes: breaststroke, butterfly, backstroke, and freestyle.

RECORD BOOK

The most decorated athlete in Olympic history is swimmer Michael Phelps *(right)*. He has won 22 medals, including 18 golds. (He won eight of those 18 in 2008 in Beijing, which stands as the record for a single Games.) Phelps will be in Rio trying to add to that tally.

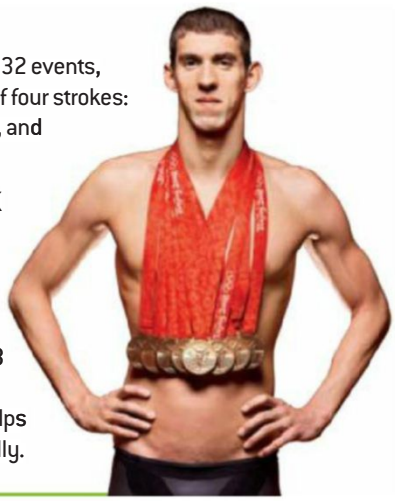


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TABLE TENNIS

It's a fancy name for good old-fashioned Ping-Pong, but it's nothing like you've ever seen in your pal's rec room. The ball can make an estimated 9,000 revolutions per minute — about four times as many as a car engine.

RULE BOOK

Players put different types of rubber coverings on each side of their paddles so they can impart different kinds of spin. The rules state that the two sides must be different colors, so a player's opponent can tell which side the ball was hit with.

TAEKWONDO

Korean for "the way of the feet and hands," taekwondo features two fighters trying to kick and punch each other in the head and torso.

DICTIONARY

Dobok: The white uniform based on traditional Korean peasant garb.

Hogu: A padded chest protector that is either red or blue. Competitors try to land kicks or punches on an opponent's hogu.

Shijak: The Korean word for "begin," which is barked by the referee at beginning of a bout.

TENNIS

Unlike other major international competitions (such as the Davis Cup), which are contested by teams organized by country, the Olympics give medals to individuals and doubles pairs.

RECORD BOOK

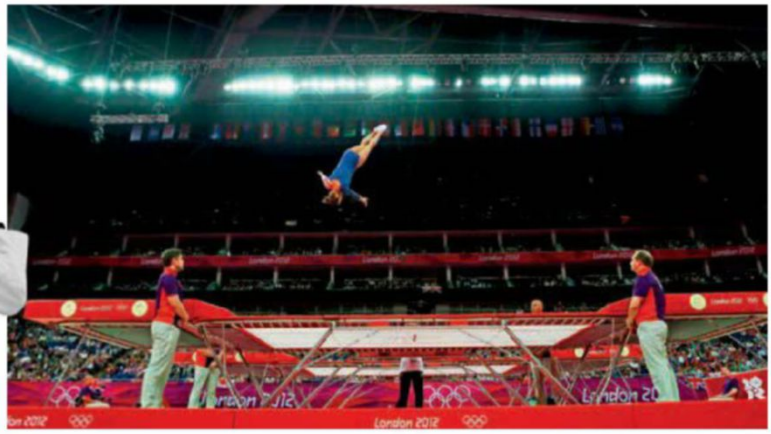
Four players have won singles titles in all four Grand Slam events (the Australian Open, the French Open, Wimbledon, and the U.S. Open) as well as the Olympics in their careers. The feat is known as a Golden Slam. The four are Steffi Graf, Serena Williams, Andre Agassi, and Rafael Nadal.

TRACK AND FIELD

While swimming dominates the first week of action in Rio, track and field takes over in Week 2. Medals are awarded in 26 sports, including everything from race walking to javelin (in which athletes throw a spear as far as they can).

RULE BOOK

About that race walking thing: Athletes must have one foot on the ground at all times, and their advancing leg must be kept straight. (It makes for some interesting mechanics.) Officials watch competitors closely to make sure they aren't breaking the rules (which would basically mean they are running, not walking.) For each infraction they are shown a red card. Three of them add up to a disqualification.



TRAMPOLINE

Another totally amped-up version of a familiar backyard pastime. Athletes perform 10-trick routines, while judges award points for difficulty, execution, and time spent in the air. And there's plenty of that: Competitors can get as high as 25 feet above the surface of the trampoline.

DICTIONARY:

Adolph: A forward somersault with 3½ twists.

Cody: A move in which the competitor lands on his or her stomach and then completes a somersault.

Salto: Another name for a somersault.

ISTOCKPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES (TABLE TENNIS PADDLES); AL TIELEMANS (TAEKWONDO); ROBERT BECK (TRACK RUNNER, VOLLEYBALL); RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES (TRAMPOLINE); CLIVE ROSE/GETTY IMAGES (WATER POLO); SIMON BRUTY (WEIGHTLIFTER, WRESTLERS)

TRIATHLON

Versatility is the key. Athletes swim 1.5 kilometers, bike 40 kilometers, and run 10 kilometers.

DICTIONARY

T1: The transition from swimming to biking. Competitors must find their bikes, put on a helmet and shoes, and get prepared to ride (which includes applying sunscreen or putting on sunglasses).

T2: The transition from biking to running. The keys are putting away the bicycle and getting running shoes on.

VOLLEYBALL

A dozen teams compete in both men's and women's tournaments. The host nation is excellent in both. Brazil has competed in five gold medal matches in the past three Games.

DICTIONARY

Kill: To smash or spike the ball over the net.

Libero: A defensive specialist who is usually good at "digging" low shots. While other players rotate, the libero always stays in the back row and isn't allowed to serve or spike the ball over the net. The libero also wears a different-color jersey from the rest of the team.

Rally scoring: A scoring system in which there is a point on every play. Previously, only the serving team could score.

WATER POLO

Remember how handball was like soccer crossed with basketball? O.K., now put it in a swimming pool, and you've got water polo, in which teams of seven try to throw a ball into a goal.

RULE BOOK

Players' feet aren't allowed to touch the bottom of the pool. If an athlete commits an infraction (others include pulling the ball underwater and holding or pushing an opponent), he or she is assessed a 20-second penalty. Three fouls and a player is done for the day.

WEIGHTLIFTING

Lifters are grouped by their weight, and they compete in two disciplines. In the snatch, they try to take the weight straight from the ground over their head. In the clean and jerk, the weight is brought under the chin and then over the head.

DICTIONARY

Bomb out: To fail to lift the weight on three straight attempts.

Plates: Another name for the weight discs.

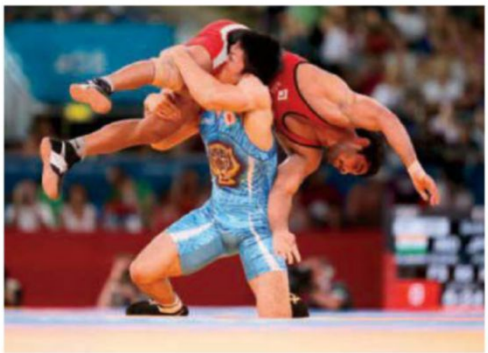
WRESTLING

Grapplers compete in freestyle and Greco-Roman. The main difference is that in Greco-Roman wrestlers are not allowed to attack below the waist or use their own legs to take down an opponent.

DICTIONARY

Fireman's carry: A takedown in which a wrestler hoists an opponent onto his or her shoulders *(below)*.

Pin: Also called a fall, it occurs when a wrestler holds both of his or her foe's shoulders to the mat, ending the match. If there is no pin, the winner is whoever has accumulated more points.



SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING I found out what giggling sounds like underwater.

BADMINTON Turns out it's

TRAMPOLINE It's a bird! It's a plane! It's a gymnast!

RHYTH
The gym

Buzz Beamer tried his hand at some Olympic events. The results were not so golden.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BILL HINDS

BUZZ WORTHY

DAVID E. KLUTHO (SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING, BADMINTON, BEACH VOLLEYBALL, TABLE TENNIS); RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES (TRAMPOLINE); KOHJIRO KINNO (RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS); JOHN W. MCDONOUGH (CANOE)

s not that kind of birdie.

BEACH VOLLEYBALL The beach dudes seemed chill. But I learned they're very serious.

MIC GYMNASTICS
nnasts were scary good. Real scary.

CANOE Olympic athletes are very focused.

TABLE TENNIS Mom always tells me not to pull out my phone at the table, but I couldn't resist.

The lowdown on the one souvenir every competitor wants to come home with: an Olympic medal.

EYES ON TH

Golden Performance

The tradition of giving medals to the top three competitors dates to the third Olympics, held in 1904. At the first Games — in Athens, Greece, in 1896 — winners were given a silver medal and an olive branch. In 1900 in Paris, many winners received trophies instead of medals. Four years later, the system still in use today was implemented: a gold medal to the winner, silver to the runner-up, and bronze to the third-place finisher.

Rio Rewards

The medals produced for the 2016 Games have a design featuring a laurel wreath surrounding the Rio logo on the front. (The leaves represent the link between nature and the competitors.) On the reverse side is an image of Nike, the Greek goddess of victory. A total of 2,488 medals were minted for the Games: 812 gold, 812 silver, and 864 bronze. (Some events, such as boxing, award two bronze medals.)

Medal Metals

Early gold medals were just that: gold. Nowadays, though, using such a precious substance would be too costly. So gold medals are made up mostly of silver, though they must contain at least six grams of gold. As a result, a gold medal from the 1900 Games is worth well over $2,000, while one from the most recent Summer Games, in London in 2012, is valued at around $700. (Of course, they're worth far more than that to the athletes who win them.)

E PRIZE

Paralympic

In addition to the medals created for the Olympics, another 2,642 were made for the Paralympics. The competition for athletes with physical disabilities and visual impairments will be in Rio in September. The medals are similar, but those for the Paralympic Games have writing in Braille, and each of the three makes a different sound when shaken. The medals also feature seed shapes that symbolize the courage and persistence of the athletes.

Eco-Friendliness

The Rio medals were designed to be environmentally friendly. Approximately 30% of the silver and bronze medals is made of recycled materials, including old electronics equipment. Some of the silver used in the gold medals came from leftover mirrors. And half of the plastic in the ribbons that are attached to the medals came from recycled bottles.

A Big Deal

Weighing in at 500 grams (that's more than a pound), the 2016 medals are the heaviest ever awarded out at the Summer Olympics. And at nearly 3 ½ inches in diameter, they are quite noticeable. That hasn't always been the case. The medals given out at the 1912 Games in Stockholm, Sweden, were just 1 ¼" in diameter and 1/16 of an inch thick. That's roughly the size of a quarter!

ALEX FERRO/JOGOS RIO 2016/GETTY IMAGES (ALL MEDALS)

MEET TEAM USA

The world's best will compete in Rio this month. These Americans hope to bring home some hardware.

Photographs by
Simon Bruty

Jordan Burroughs

WRESTLING
Age: 28
Hometown: Sicklerville, NJ

When Burroughs reflects on his gold-medal-winning Olympic debut in London four years ago, he reaches a surprising conclusion. "In 2012, I wasn't as good of a wrestler," he recalls. "But I was extremely confident, borderline arrogant."

Leading up to those Summer Games, Burroughs adopted a five-word slogan: *All I see is gold*. It was bold, even for someone who had achieved so much success in such a short time.

Though Burroughs initially struggled at the University of Nebraska, he won two national championships (in 2009 and '11) and the Hodge Trophy as the nation's most outstanding wrestler as a senior. Three weeks after his final college match, he won the U.S. Open.

The then 23-year-old earned a spot on Team USA and dominated at the world championships in Istanbul, Turkey, that September, becoming the fourth wrestler to win an NCAA and world title in the same year. Though he had won 53 matches in a row, his record disguised that he had yet to master several aspects of wrestling.

"I didn't know all of the intricacies of the sport," he recalls. "I knew I could be successful, but I didn't know how. I was kind of hoping that what I had been doing was good enough."

Despite lacking variety in his offensive moves, Burroughs backed up his daring prediction at the 2012 Olympics. He defeated Iranian wrestler Sadegh Goudarzi in two consecutive periods, earning the United States one of its 46 gold medals of those Games.

Representing the U.S. alongside other talented athletes and realizing his goal of winning gold, however,

inspired a shift in Burroughs' mentality.

"I had dreamed of winning an Olympic medal for such a long time," he remembers. "As soon as I hopped off the plane, I wanted to get back to the challenge and pursue something bigger and greater than myself."

PIN AND WIN
Burroughs enters Rio a more technically sound — and humbler — wrestler.

Armed with his gold medal — and professing a newfound humility — he decided to reevaluate his wrestling abilities for the next Olympics. He also focused on his personal life: In 2013 he married his longtime girlfriend, Lauren Mariacher, who walked down the aisle in gold wrestling shoes. (Their son, Beacon, is now one.)

Over the next several years, Burroughs spent weeks at USA training camps, traveled to overseas tournaments, and trained with partners he didn't know well. He pushed himself outside his comfort zone. Teammates and coaches recognized an attitude adjustment and as a result wanted to spend more time around him, offering to help in any way they could.

"As an athlete you have to continually evolve to be successful," Burroughs says. "I feel very confident not because of my mind set but because of my preparation. Teammates and coaches have helped me tremendously. I've put myself in countless situations where I had to make sacrifices and be uncomfortable and commit to the sport. Now I'm capable. I've got everything I need."

Burroughs hopes to defend his Olympic title in Brazil, but he will be satisfied whatever the outcome, as long as he competes at his highest level. Perhaps more important, he's approaching this summer with a greater appreciation for the prestige of the Olympics.

"There's a long time between Rio and Tokyo," he says of the four years until the 2020 Olympics. "I don't want it to pass by so quickly that the only thing I get out of it is a gold medal. I want more lasting memories than just the memorabilia associated with wrestling well."

Burroughs hopes to revel in the spirit of the Olympics and experience the fanfare. He wants to watch other events and network with other Olympians.

"You have to look beyond the actual competition and beyond the thrill of victory to find value from the Olympics," Burroughs says. "If you can do those things and you can win, in addition to enjoying yourself, that's when you really have a tremendous experience."

—*LAUREN SHUTE*

Missy Franklin
Ryan Lochte

SWIMMING
Ages: 21, 32
Hometowns: Centennial, CO, and Daytona Beach, FL

When you win four Olympic golds before your 18th birthday, what can you possibly do for an encore? Lots, as it turns out. Franklin, a backstroke specialist who has since won six world championships and four NCAA titles, enters the summer

JASON SZENES/EPA (BURROUGHS); HARRY HOW/GETTY IMAGES (ZHANG)

as the world-record holder in the 200-meter race and the American-record holder in the 100.

Franklin is early in her Olympic career, but this will be Lochte's fourth trip to the Games. He's won at least one gold at each Olympics dating to 2004, and he has 11 total medals. Lochte, the world-record holder in the 200 and 400 individual medleys, usually puts away 6,000 to 8,000 calories a day starting with a breakfast of eggs (five or six!), potatoes, toast, milk, and orange juice.

These two know pressure, but Franklin sees it as a positive. "In my mind, I have so many people — coaches, friends, family, fans — who believe I can do what I did again," Franklin told *Glamour*. "It makes me feel that I am capable."

MEET TEAM USA

Lexi Thompson
Stacy Lewis

GOLF

Ages: 21, 31

Hometowns: Coral Springs, FL, and Toledo, OH

Thompson was 12 when she became the youngest person to qualify for the U.S. Women's Open. She'll join Lewis, a two-time major championship winner, in Rio. Both helped the U.S. beat Europe's best golfers for the 2015 Solheim Cup. Now they'll take on the world.

Lily Zhang

TABLE TENNIS

Age: 20

Hometown: Palo Alto, CA

Zhang's favorite part of the 2012 London Olympics was the instant the Games began. "The moment you walk out into the stadium for the opening ceremony, you see all of the lights and people cheering," Zhang remembers. "It was magical."

But Zhang, then 16 and the third-youngest member of Team USA in any sport, was also shocked by the size and scope of the Summer Games. After losing her first match (the U.S. women also lost their team opener), Zhang started looking ahead to 2016, promising herself she would be better prepared for Rio.

Four years later, Zhang has interacted with more athletes, experienced different cultures, and gained maturity and experience. "I used to get really nervous before every match," Zhang admits. "Now I tell myself to take a deep breath and enjoy every second of the experience, even the butterflies." When she found she would have little time to practice as a freshman in college, she decided to take the year off in order to train six days a week — sometimes for six hours at a time.

In 2014, Zhang played in "the most nerve-racking match" of her life, winning bronze at the Youth Olympic Games in Nanjing, China. "Being able to handle that [pressure] gave me a lot of confidence and motivation for Rio."

As Zhang's poise has improved, she has developed her tricky backhand (it's fast, but also controlled) and has continued to see results. At the 2015 Pan American Games in Toronto, Canada, she earned singles bronze and helped the U.S. collect team gold. She then added a women's singles title at the 2015 North American Championships. "Being able to go out to these huge tournaments and to feel the pressure, and then handle the pressure, has taught me to trust myself a lot more, so I'm hoping for better results this time."

—L.S.

Women's Eight

ROWING

In the months leading up to Rio, Meghan Musnicki often recalled sitting on the starting line in 2012 during her Olympic debut. Eleanor Logan, a teammate who had won gold in the women's eight boat in Beijing four years earlier, turned around and focused on Musnicki. "She looked at me and said, 'This is what we train for; we can do this.'" Musnicki recalls. Just six minutes later, Musnicki and her teammates defended their gold medal, finishing 67 seconds ahead of the second-place boat.

Now the 33-year-old Musnicki is the senior member of the U.S. women's eight, one of the most dominant teams the sport has ever seen. (There are nine people in the boat: Eight hold one oar each and one, the coxswain, steers.) Still, after winning 10 consecutive world titles — Musnicki has been a member of the team for five of the 10 wins — a third straight Olympic gold is paramount.

"It's always exciting to line up against the best female athletes in the world. You always feel excitement, anticipation, and a little bit of anxiety before you compete in big races," Musnicki says. "At the same time [the Olympics] are always in the back of your mind. It's the end goal."

So while every U.S. athlete will try to earn gold in Brazil, the women's eight boat will attempt an even grander feat: becoming one of the most successful U.S. Olympic programs of all time.

"This cycle I find myself stepping back and kind of appreciating the time I have with my teammates," Musnicki says. "We find ourselves pushing beyond what we thought we could do together."

—L.S.

Ashleigh Johnson
Maggie Steffens

WATER POLO

Ages: 21, 23

Hometowns: Miami, FL, and Danville, CA

Fresh off their win at the FINA World League Super Final, Johnson and Steffens will attempt to lead the U.S. to a second straight Olympic gold medal. Even though she's only 23, Steffens is one of four players returning from the 2012 squad that won at the London Games. Johnson wasn't on that team, but she was named the 2015 FINA World Championship Top Goalkeeper and MVP of that year's final match.

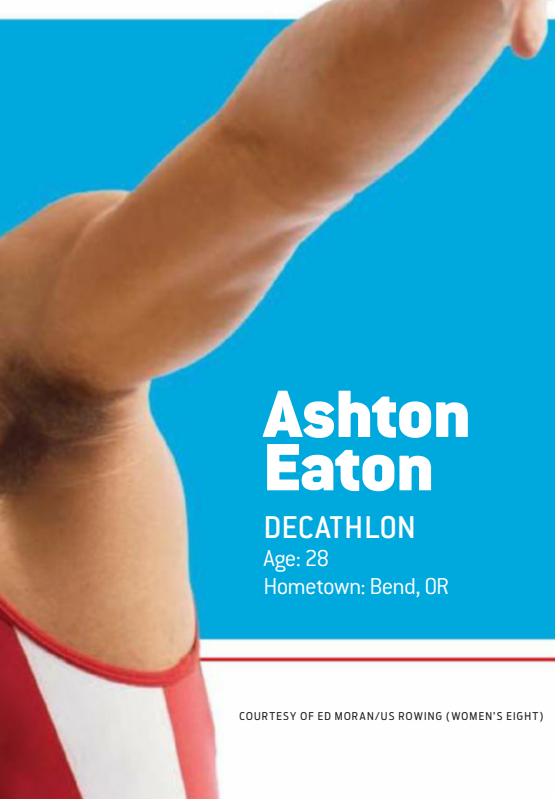
Bethany Zummo

SITTING VOLLEYBALL

Age: 23

Hometown: Dublin, CA

Zummo, who was born with two congenital disorders, had her right leg amputated below the knee when she was two years old. She used a prosthetic while playing volleyball in middle school and high school. Since 2011 she has helped Team USA win three international championships in sitting volleyball. Next up: the Olympics. The U.S. won bronze in 2004, the first year the sport was open to women at the Paralympics, then earned silver in '08 and '12. At the last Games, China took gold, but the U.S. just defeated China in March at the World ParaVolley International Cup, which bodes well for Zummo and her teammates.



Ashton Eaton

DECATHLON

Age: 28

Hometown: Bend, OR

To win the decathlon, which consists of 10 track and field events, you have to be a well-rounded athlete. Eaton, who wrestled and played football in high school, just might be the most well-rounded athlete of all time.

The defending Olympic gold medalist and two-time world champion holds the world record for most points scored (9,045) during the two-day event, which consists of 100-, 400-, and 1,500-meter races, along with the long jump, shot put, high jump, 110-meter hurdles, discus throw, pole vault, and javelin throw.

His wife, Brianne Theisen-Eaton, will also try to medal. She is the Canadian record holder in the women's outdoor competition called the heptathlon, which has seven events. The two met at the University of Oregon, where they won a combined 12 NCAA indoor and outdoor titles.

The winner of the Olympic decathlon has been called the "world's greatest athlete." Can Eaton retain that title?

COURTESY OF ED MORAN/US ROWING (WOMEN'S EIGHT)

Vashti Cunningham

HIGH JUMP

Age: 18
Hometown: Las Vegas, Nevada

After Cunningham won the gold medal in the high jump at the World Indoor Track and Field Championships in March, she took a lap with the Stars and Stripes draped around her shoulders and faced the media. But she still had more to do: homework.

At only 18 years old, the high school senior became the youngest woman ever to win an International Association of Athletics Federations world indoor title. While Cunningham may be far younger than many of her competitors, she has plenty of experience, since she began her high jump career in the fifth grade. She now trains under her father, four-time Pro Bowl quarterback Randall Cunningham. I caught up with her after the worlds for a chat.

SI Kids: Who are some of your track and field role models?
Vashti Cunningham: [Sprinter] Allyson Felix, and [high jumpers] Anna Chicherova and Blanka Vlasic.
SIK: Your father competed on a big stage when he played in the NFL. Has he given you any advice about competing at an event like the world championships?
VC: My dad has given me a lot of advice: how to take it all in, how to deal with [success] without being haughty, and how to give energy back to the crowd.
SIK: Your dad used to compete in the high jump before his football career, and your older brother, Randall II, competes in high jump now at USC. What's it like being around so many great high jumpers? Do you talk about high jump often with your family?
VC: My brother and I are best friends. We're a dynamic duo. We don't spend all of our time talking about high jump, but sometimes we help each other out.
SIK: Do you have any advice for young high jumpers?
VC: Enjoy it now, and have fun. When you get to high school, work hard, and have a thirst for success. And go be great.

—KID REPORTER JACK KELLEY

JACOB KEPLER (CUNNINGHAM); KOHJIRO KINNO (BILES IN HOUSTON)

Women's Gymnastics

At the London Games in 2012, the United States took its first team Olympic title since 1996. While Gabby Douglas (seated, *center*) became the first African-American gymnast to win women's all-around gold, teammate Aly Raisman (seated, *right*) was the most decorated American gymnast of those Games, earning medals for beam (bronze) and floor exercise (gold) to go with her team gold.

The sport of gymnastics changes quickly, however, and in four years the national team has been transformed dramatically. Maggie Nichols (seated, *left*), a member of the 2015 world title team and the 2016 American Cup silver medalist, will likely make her Olympic debut. And some of the most intense competition of the Games may unfold between Douglas and phenom Simone Biles (kneeling and *below*, training in Houston, Texas). Though Biles will also be making her first Olympic appearance, the 4' 9" dynamo has long been the front-runner to win all-around gold. (She's so accomplished there is a complicated floor move named after her.) Last fall Biles became the first gymnast to win three consecutive world championships. Former gymnast Shannon Miller, who led the U.S. to team victory in '96, believes that this summer Biles could win the only medal she doesn't have: Olympic gold. "Simone has some of the most difficult skills and routines being performed in the world," Miller said. "But she also brings the execution."

—L.S.

Claressa Shields

BOXING

Age: 21
Hometown: Flint, MI

During the May middleweight quarterfinals of the Women's World Boxing Championships in Kazakhstan, Shields faced local favorite Violleta Knyazeva, who had the support of a raucous crowd. "Fans had drums and were yelling, *Kaza, Kaza!*" Shields recalls. "You couldn't hear anything else."

That is, until Shields silenced them with a unanimous decision (3–0) over Knyazeva. "I embrace the crowd when everyone is against me. When they yelled, 'Kaza,' I was like, Oh, really? Boop, boop, boop," Shields says, adding sound effects for her jabs. "I thought, No matter how loud you cheer for her, this girl is going to get beat."

When Shields, a two-time women's elite world champ, took down Nouchka Fontijn of the Netherlands in the final, the same fans who rooted against the American began chanting, *U-S-A!* "I love beating the odds and winning," she says.

Shields, who in 2012 became the first U.S. female boxer to win Olympic gold, has long triumphed in the face of adversity. And she has turned to her sport to find an escape from life's hardships. Her father was in prison when she was two to nine years old; her mother struggled with alcohol and drug abuse. More recently, Shields's family has been affected by the water contamination crisis in Flint. For Shields, boxing is a happy distraction. "When the ref raises my hand and declares me the winner, that's when all my worries disappear," she says.

Her father signed her up for her first boxing lesson when she was 11. Before Shields blossomed into a dominant fighter (74–1), she remembers being quiet but also a crybaby. With success has come maturity — and Shields is certainly no longer reserved. "I'm going to be a household name after Rio," she boasts. She balances her confidence with a message of resilience, though. "It doesn't matter where you come from or what your upbringing is like. You can rise above all of that," she says.

Her will to win gold again is not just about another accolade. Shields wants to elevate women's boxing. "I like men's boxing, but I feel like I box better than a lot of men," Shields says. No shade — just straight talk from a fighter with a bigger vision. "I want to see equal pay and our fights on television," she says. "Winning another gold medal can help us go in that direction."

—CHRISTINA M. TAPPER

Men's Basketball

As the NBA season drew to a close, several superstars announced they would sit out the Summer Games to rest or heal. But Indiana Pacer Paul George *(right)* wanted in — even though the last time he sported a Team USA jersey, in an exhibition game in 2014, he suffered a horrific leg injury. The 6' 9" forward came back strong in 2015–16, averaging 23.1 points and 7.0 rebounds for the Pacers. The three-time All-Star will join Kevin Durant, Carmelo Anthony, and Klay Thompson to try to win a 15th gold medal in basketball for the United States this summer. —L.S.

Matt Stutzman

ARCHERY

Age: 33

Hometown: Kalona, IA

In October 2009, Stutzman, who was born without arms, was unemployed. He decided the cheapest way to feed his family would be to bow-hunt deer. Stutzman began intensely studying archery videos on YouTube, imagining his right leg and shoulder as the archer's arms. Within two weeks he could hit an apple from 20 yards. By early 2011, he had won his first competition. The next year, he won a silver medal at the London Paralympics. Last December, he set a Guinness World Record by hitting a target from 310 yards. Says Stutzman, "Everything has just been a whirlwind." —D.G.

HARRY HOW/GETTY IMAGES (SHIELDS); EVAN GOLE/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (GEORGE)

Ibtihaj Muhammad

FENCING

Age: 30
Hometown: Maplewood, NJ

As a young athlete who played tennis, softball, and volleyball and ran track, Muhammad often wore extra clothing to cover her body so that she could conform to traditional Muslim standards of dress. But when she was 12, she and her mother discovered a sport where that wouldn't be unusual: fencing, which has full-body uniforms. "When I put on my fencing mask, no one sees my hijab," Muhammad says, referring to her head scarf. "I'm just another athlete seen solely for their skill set."

Still, she faced discrimination and odd looks when she showed up to events where most of the competitors were white and many were not familiar with Muslim customs. She stood out not only because of her hijab, but also because of the color of her skin. "When people told me I couldn't do certain things," she says, "I said, O.K., I'm gonna show you how well I can do it *and* I'm gonna do it better than you can."

After graduating from Duke in 2007, her goal was to qualify for the U.S. Olympic team and add diversity to the squad. A torn hand ligament prevented her from making it in '12, but in February she qualified for this year's Games by winning a bronze medal at the Women's Saber World Cup. In Rio, she will become the first woman to compete for the U.S. while wearing a hijab.

"I think when people hear my story, they see where there's a will, there's a way," she says. "You owe it to yourself to create and dictate your own journey."

—D.G.

Allyson Felix

TRACK AND FIELD

Age: 30
Hometown: Santa Clarita, CA

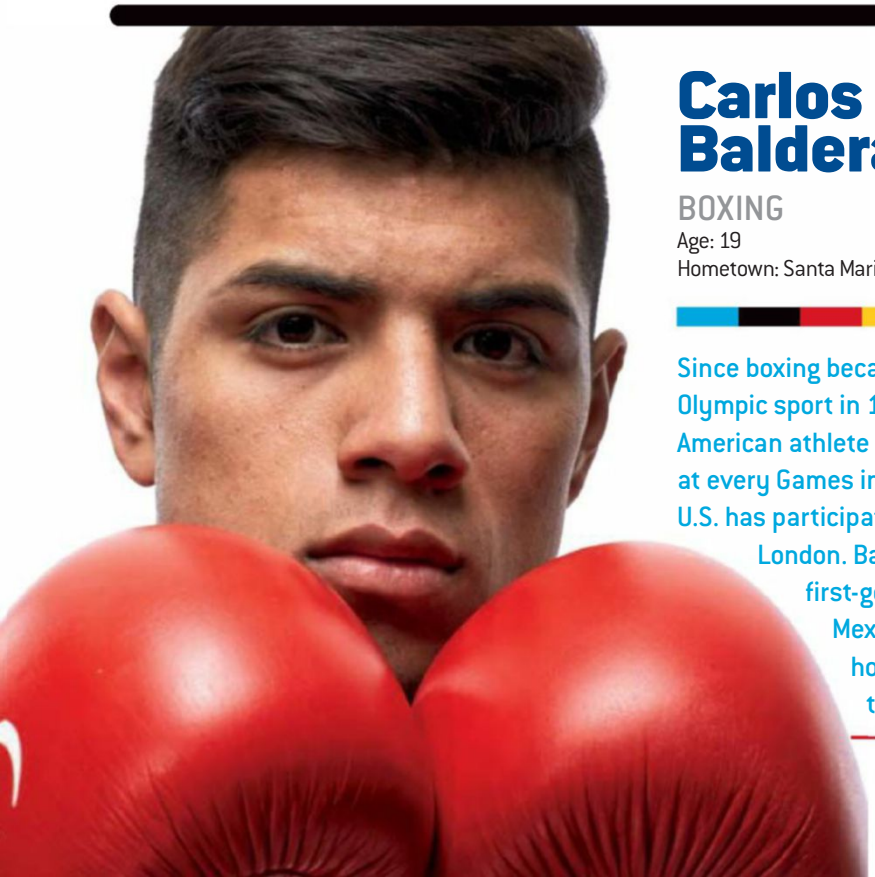
The third time was the charm for Felix, who in 2012 finally took home a gold medal in an individual sprint, the 200-meter race, after earning silver at the two previous Games. She also earned gold in both of the United States' sprint relays. One year ago, she won the 400 world championship, and in January, thanks to a schedule change, Felix found out she'd be able to pursue wins in the 200 and 400 in Rio. (The first round of the 200 had been 75 minutes after the 400 final. Now the 200 prelims are the next day.) "I feel like I'm at a place where I really want to go for it and take risks," Felix told *Elle*.

Women's Basketball

Talk about a stacked lineup. This year's version of the Dream Team boasts six WNBA MVPs, and nine of the 12 players already have at least one Olympic gold. Sue Bird *(near left)*, Tamika Catchings *(far left)*, and Diana Taurasi have each won three; Seimone Augustus and Sylvia Fowles have won two; and Tina Charles, Angel McCoughtry, Maya Moore, and Lindsay Whalen won their first golds in London in 2012.

The U.S. will attempt to win a sixth consecutive gold and second under UConn coach Geno Auriemma. Fresh off her fourth straight national championship for Auriemma's Huskies, Breanna Stewart will join Brittney Griner and Elena Delle Donne *(seated)* as the Olympic rookies.

"I know this year is one of the most competitive years we've ever had for a U.S. women's Olympic basketball team," Stewart told SI in April. "I realize I'd go from playing a lot of minutes to getting not so many, but that's what happens when you're with so many great players. I can learn so much just from watching and practicing."



Carlos Balderas

BOXING

Age: 19

Hometown: Santa Maria, CA

Since boxing became an Olympic sport in 1904, an American athlete has medaled at every Games in which the U.S. has participated — until London. Balderas, a first-generation Mexican-American, hopes to help the U.S. team return to prominence in Rio. The 19-year-old was the first American fighter to qualify for the Summer Games when he won the World Series of Boxing last November, but he's been preparing for more than a decade.

Balderas's father, Xenon, introduced young Carlos to boxing because the feisty seven-year-old was getting suspended from school for fighting. Now Balderas will have the chance to win the United States' 50th gold medal in the sport. —L.S.

GLOBAL PO

From Japanese judokas to Cuban clubbers, here's a look at who dominates what.

MAP BY JOHN ROMAN

United States: BASKETBALL
Hoopsters have won 21 of 28 gold medals — the men are 14 for 18 and the women have taken seven of 10.

Canada SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING
Cooled off recently, but was a force from 1984–92, winning six medals in solo and duet.

Switzerland TRIATHLON
Only country with more than one gold (the Swiss have a pair).

Sweden MODERN PENTATHLON
Dominated early on, sweeping all three medals in 1912, '20, and '24.

Great Britain SAILING
No one has more than the Brits' 25 gold medals, including four from Ben Ainslie.

Mexico SYNCHRONIZED DIVING
O.K., Mexico doesn't dominate like the Chinese, but the country has medaled in three of the last four competitions.

Cuba BOXING
Only the U.S. (population 322 million) has more medals than Cuba (population 11 million).

France CYCLING
Has won 97 medals, but Great Britain (81) has 26–10 edge in last two Games.

Jamaica TRACK AND FIELD
Sprinters have won 18 of 28 possible medals in the 100- and 200-meter events in the last two Games.

Italy FENCING
Has won 123 medals, led by Edoardo Mangiarotti (13), whose brother Dario has won three.

Brazil BEACH VOLLEYBALL
Has been in seven of the sport's 10 gold medal matches.

Germany EQUESTRIAN
These horse whisperers have medaled in team mixed dressage in every Olympics except one.

Hungary WATER POLO
Home of Dezso Gyarmati, a five-time medalist considered the greatest player of all time.

Russia VOLLEYBALL
Has six medals, plus 12 as part of the Soviet Union. No other nation has more than nine.

Romania WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS
Has won a medal in the team all-around at each of the last 10 Olympics.

Chinese Taipei TAEKWONDO
Tiny nation is tied for second with eight medals.

China TABLE TENNIS
Owners of 24 of the 28 gold medals awarded.

South Korea ARCHERY
Awarded 34 medals — that's three more than any other country.

Bulgaria WEIGHTLFTING
Fourth all time with 36 medals — including a six-medal haul in 1972.

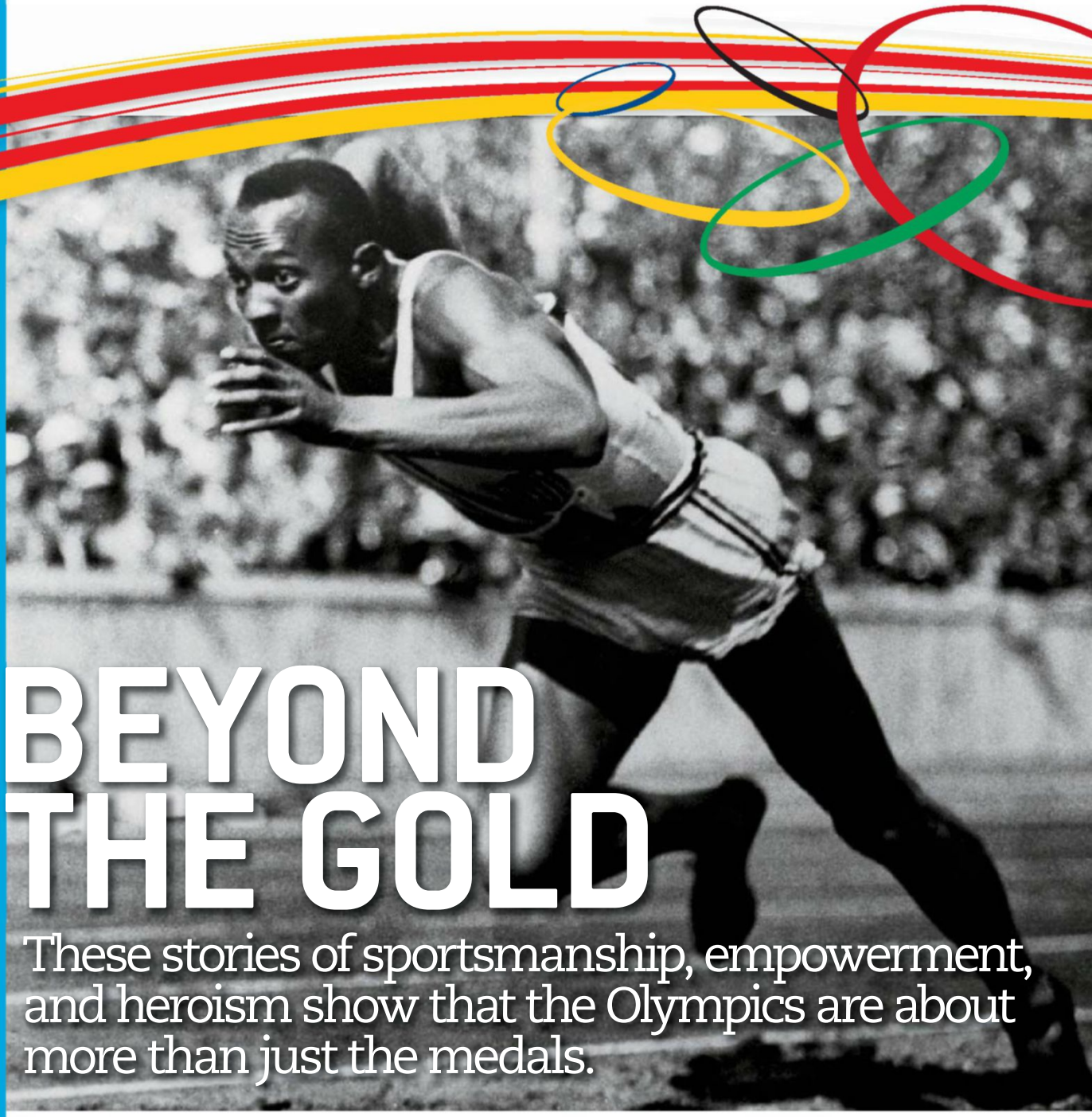
Japan JUDO
Has taken home most medals at each of last six Games.

India FIELD HOCKEY
Olympics-best eight gold medals in field hockey — and only one in all other sports.

Indonesia BADMINTON
Of 27 total medals, 18 have come in badminton (only China has more).

Australia SWIMMING
Second all time with 183 medals — despite being only 56th in the world in population.

WERS



BEYOND THE GOLD

These stories of sportsmanship, empowerment, and heroism show that the Olympics are about more than just the medals.

Doing What's Right

Los Angeles, 1932

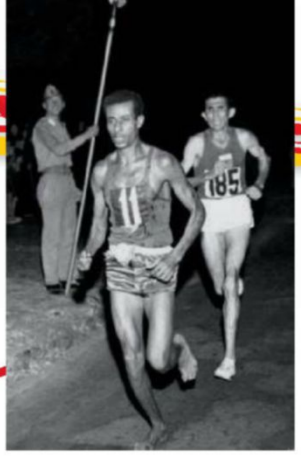
British fencer Judy Guinness took the saying "honesty is the best policy" to heart. In a close final round against Ellen Preis of Austria, Guinness was crowned the winner. But she didn't celebrate. Instead, the 21-year-old told judges that they missed two hits by Preis. Guinness earned a silver medal.

Triumph in the Face of Racism

Berlin, 1936

When Olympic competition arrived in Germany, the country's leader, the Nazi party's Adolf Hitler, promoted propaganda that Germans were descended from a superior "master race." Hitler, however, was undermined by the dynamic performance of African-American U.S. track and field star Jesse Owens, who won four gold medals. Owens tied the world record in the 100-meter race (10.3 seconds). He then set world records in the 200 meters (20.7 seconds) and in the long jump (26 feet 5⅝ inches). Owens also won gold with the U.S.'s 4 × 100 team, rebuking Nazi beliefs while solidifying himself as one of the best athletes of all time.

AP



Barefoot Marathon

Rome, 1960

Abebe Bikila, who trained for the 26.2-mile race without sneakers, was a late addition to the Ethiopian marathon team when he replaced an injured runner. With so few sponsor sneakers left to choose from, Bikila picked up an ill-fitting pair. He ditched them hours before the race, ran barefoot, and won gold.

Delaying the Start

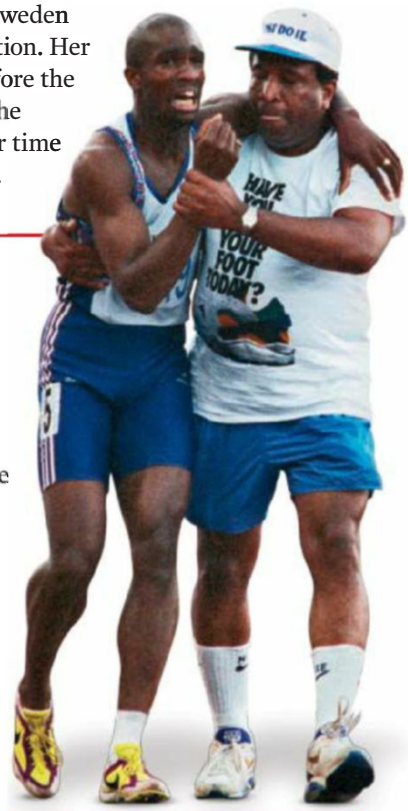
Beijing, 2008

Hold it! That's what U.S. swimmer Dara Torres pleaded to race officials when she saw Therese Alshammar of Sweden had a swimsuit malfunction. Her suit had ripped twice before the race. Thanks to Torres, the officials gave Alshammar time to switch to another suit.

Black Power Salute

Mexico City, 1968

It was a silent protest, but the message was loud. Tommie Smith *(middle)* and John Carlos *(right)*, gold and bronze medalists in the 200-meter race, bowed their heads and raised their gloved fists in the air as "The Star-Spangled Banner" played. The bold salute, a symbol of the Black Power movement, put a spotlight on racial oppression and African-Americans' fight for equality and justice.



Father-Son Finish

Barcelona, 1992

During the 400-meter race, Derek Redmond tore his hamstring. He was, however, determined to cross the finish line. His father, Jim, was determined to help him. Jim ran from the stands to the track and helped his son complete the race.

Rescue at Sea

Seoul, 1988

Canadian sailor Lawrence Lemieux was in second place in his event — which shared the same choppy waters with two other races — when he spotted a two-man team from Singapore in trouble. Their boat had capsized, and they were in the water and injured. Lemieux rescued them and placed 22nd. He earned the Pierre de Coubertin medal for sportsmanship.

Hurdler Liu Xiang

London, 2012

Just as he was about to clear the first hurdle in the 110-meter race, Liu Xiang of China tore his Achilles tendon. After the heat was over fellow sprinters Andrew Turner of Britain and Jackson Quiñónez of Spain ran to Xiang's aid and helped him into a wheelchair.

CENTRAL PRESS/GETTY IMAGES (BIKILA); AP (SMITH AND CARLOS); TIMOTHY CLARY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (TORRES); SANKEI ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES (REDMONDS); DANIEL OCHOA DE OLZA/AP (XIANG)

WHAT TO WATCH

Photograph
Courtesy AECOM

So many events, so little time! Don't worry, though. We've got your ultimate Olympic viewing guide, featuring all the must-see action. And play along with our Rio medal predictor to see if you've got what it takes to be a gold medal-winning fan.

DAY 1
SATURDAY AUGUST 6

8:30 A.M. CYCLING: MEN'S ROAD RACE Want to get a view of the host city? Check out the first medal event of the Rio Games, in which cyclists will make seven laps around various parts of Rio de Janeiro. (The race lasts around six hours.) Taylor Phinney *(below)*, the son of two Olympic medalists, will lead Team USA. Perhaps his most formidable foe will be Peter Sagan, a first-time Olympian who won the men's road race at the 2015 world championships.

1:00 P.M. ARCHERY: MEN'S TEAM American Brady Ellison, one of the world's best archers, shot a bear with his bow and arrow when he was just 11 years old. The Cowboy Archer, as Ellison has been called, is expected to lead the U.S. to gold.

6:00 P.M. MEN'S BASKETBALL: U.S. VS. CHINA After spending much of the NBA Finals chasing each other around, Klay Thompson and Kyrie Irving will join forces as the U.S. opens group play.

WHO WILL LEAD THE U.S. MEN'S B-BALL TEAM IN SCORING? IF YOU SELECT OTHER AND ARE CORRECT, GIVE YOURSELF TWO POINTS.

- ☐ PAUL GEORGE
- ☐ KEVIN DURANT
- ☐ OTHER

DAY 2
SUNDAY AUGUST 7

9:45 A.M. TENNIS: FIRST ROUND After winning the French Open in June, Novak Djokovic completed the career Grand Slam and became the reigning champion of all four major tournaments. Next up: winning Olympic gold, which would solidify his spot atop the tennis world.

2:00 P.M. SYNCHRONIZED DIVING: WOMEN'S THREE-METER SPRINGBOARD Canada's Jennifer Abel and Pamela Ware team up with the 10-meter duo of Roseline Filion and Meaghan Benfeito to form the Fab IV. Abel *(below)* and Ware are the favorite here. They might try dive 5154B, which sounds like a *Star Wars* character but is actually two-and-a-half somersaults and two twists.

9:00 P.M. SWIMMING At 19, Katie Ledecky already has the Ledecky Slam named after her. It entails winning a gold medal in every freestyle event, which Ledecky did at the 2015 world championships. Her quest to pull off an Olympic version begins with the finals of the 400-meter free, an event she won in the 2012 Games as a 15-year-old.

WILL NOVAK DJOKOVIC CAPTURE HIS FIRST GOLD MEDAL?

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO

DAY 3
MONDAY AUGUST 8

9:00 A.M. FIELD HOCKEY: U.S. VS. AUSTRALIA After finishing in last place in the 2012 Olympics, Team USA has rebounded in international play. The Yanks won gold at the Pan-American Games last year, a testament to their improvement. An opening match against the Aussies will indicate if the U.S. can contend for the country's third field hockey medal.

3:00 P.M. GYMNASTICS: MEN'S TEAM FINAL Eight countries will compete to be the Olympic champions. China has won gold in the team all-around for two straight Games. The U.S. is a longshot to win, but success stories like John Orozco, who tore his Achilles last summer but is back to compete, make this a must-watch event.

4:30 P.M. WOMEN'S RUGBY Rugby Sevens, a form of the sport with seven players on each side, is making its Olympic debut in Rio. The women's medal matches will be interesting. The field includes perennial power New Zealand, which will be the team to beat. The U.S. team features several crossover athletes. Alev Kelter, for example, played flag football, ice hockey, and soccer before joining the U.S. squad.

DAY 4
TUESDAY AUGUST 9

9:00 A.M. EQUESTRIAN Not only does equestrian Beezie Madden have one of the coolest names on Team USA, she's also one of the country's oldest competitors. At 52 years old, Madden will compete in her fourth consecutive Games in Rio as part of the U.S. show jumping team.

3:00 P.M. GYMNASTICS: WOMEN'S TEAM FINAL Gymnasts rarely compete in back-to-back Olympics for the competitive U.S. team, but this year is an exception. Gabby Douglas and Aly Raisman, who were gold medalists in London in 2012, will compete in their second straight Games. The U.S. beat out China, led by Shang Chunsong *(below)*, to win the world championship last year.

6:00 P.M. WOMEN'S SOCCER: U.S. VS. COLOMBIA After last summer's World Cup victory, there isn't much doubt that the Americans are the best in the world. Expect a fast start: The U.S. hammered tonight's opponent, Colombia, 7–0 and 3–0 when the teams met in a pair of friendlies in April.

WHO WILL WIN THE MOST MEDALS FOR THE U.S. WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS TEAM?

- ☐ SIMONE BILES
- ☐ GABBY DOUGLAS
- ☐ ALY RAISMAN

FROM LEFT: BRYN LENNON/GETTY IMAGES; VAUGHN RIDLEY/GETTY IMAGES; HARRY HOW/GETTY IMAGES; IAN MACNICOL/GETTY IMAGES

DAY 5
WEDNESDAY AUGUST 10

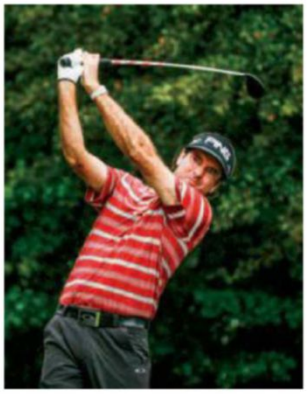
12:30 P.M. MEN'S SOCCER: ARGENTINA VS. HONDURAS Fans of the United States will watch this game and think about what might have been. Despite hosting the qualification tournament, the U.S. failed to make the field for the Games, thanks in part to a 2–0 loss to Honduras. Don't discount the tiny Central American nation: Honduras made it to the quarterfinals in 2012.

2:30 P.M. WOMEN'S BASKETBALL: U.S. VS. SERBIA Elena Delle Donne *(below)* will lead Team USA in its quest for a sixth straight Olympic gold medal. She is an advocate for lowering the rim, but for now the 6' 5" WNBA MVP will showcase her talents on a 10-foot rim. She will be joined by three-time gold medalists Tamika Catchings, Sue Bird, and Diana Taurasi on an experienced team that features just one player, Breanna Stewart, who is younger than 25.

9:00 P.M. SWIMMING Few athletes handle short distances in the pool better than Nathan Adrian. He's the American record holder in the 50-meter freestyle. Tonight he'll try to defend his 2012 gold medal in the 100 meters. It'll take less than a minute, but for a sprint specialist like Adrian, that's almost an eternity.

DAY 6
THURSDAY AUGUST 11

7:00 A.M. BADMINTON, GOLF The early birdies will get the worm. Both badminton and men's golf begin, so you can either watch some of the world's best golfers, such as Bubba Watson *(below)*, try to make birdies or watch badminton players try to hit birdies. (Shuttlecocks can travel up to 248 miles per hour.)



3:00 P.M. GYMNASTICS: WOMEN'S ALL-AROUND Simone Biles of the United States is the favorite to dominate in Rio after winning her fourth national title in June. Legend Mary Lou Retton, who won the all-around in 1984, has called Biles "unbeatable."

9:00 P.M. SWIMMING World-record holder Ryan Lochte will try to win gold in the 200-meter individual medley. Standing in his way: Michael Phelps, who's won the event in the last two Olympics.

10: P.M. TABLE TENNIS: MEN'S SINGLES FINAL Who knew ping-pong could be this intense? Zhang Jike of China is one of four players to achieve a career Grand Slam (gold medals in singles at the world championships, World Cup and Olympics). He is back and looking to defend the singles and team gold medals he won in London four years ago.

DAY 7
FRIDAY AUGUST 12

11:00 A.M. TENNIS: MEN'S DOUBLES FINAL Americans Bob and Mike Bryan are trying to win their second straight doubles gold after completing their career Golden Slam (a Grand Slam and an Olympic gold) in London four years ago. But there's one opponent they may not be able to defeat: Father Time. The pair are now 38 years old.

2:30 P.M. JUDO You might want to make sure you let your lunch sit for a while before you watch these heavyweight competitors toss each other around. Medals are awarded today in the biggest weight classes (over 220 pounds for men, over 172 for women).

9:00 P.M. SWIMMING The most decorated Olympian in history will look to add to his incredible medal haul. Michael Phelps, swimming in his fifth Games, *(below)* has won 22 medals will be one of the favorites in the 200-meter butterfly. His time in the Olympic trials was five seconds slower than his world record. But he was still the fastest American, and with a medal on the line, look for him to find an extra gear.

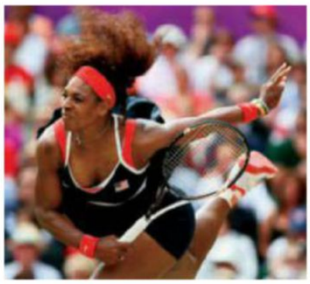
HOW MANY TOTAL MEDALS WILL MISSY FRANKLIN AND KATIE LEDECKY DELIVER FOR THE U.S.?

- ☐ 7 OR LESS
- ☐ 8 OR MORE

DAY 8
SATURDAY AUGUST 13

7:50 A.M. ROWING: WOMEN'S EIGHTS Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream. Not likely. These athletes won't be doing anything gently. Among the athletes in action are the U.S. women's eight. The team has won every world championship and Olympic race since 2006, making them one of the most successful dyansties in the sport's history.

11:00 A.M. TENNIS: WOMEN'S FINAL Serena Williams *(below)* will compete for her second straight singles title, which would bring her total gold medal count to five (thanks to a superb doubles career alongside her sister Venus). Her closest competition will likely be Garbine Muguruza of Spain, who upset Williams in the French Open final just two months ago.



7:00 P.M. TRACK AND FIELD Everyone knows Jamaica's Usain Bolt is the fastest man alive. The fastest woman also hails from that island nation. Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce has won the 100 meters at the past two Olympics, and she showed at the 2015 world championships that she's still got it. Look for the 29-year-old to make it a three-peat.

WHO WILL WIN THE WOMEN'S TENNIS GOLD MEDAL FOR DOUBLES PLAY?

- ☐ VENUS AND SERENA
- ☐ ANYONE ELSE

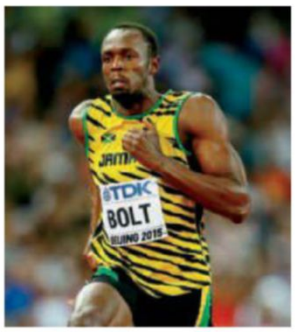
FROM LEFT: ALEX MENENDEZ/GETTY IMAGES; DAVID CANNON/GETTY IMAGES; JENNIFER POTTHEISER/GETTY IMAGES; CLIVE BRUNSKILL/GETTY IMAGES

DAY 9
SUNDAY AUGUST 14

11:15 A.M. WOMEN'S MARATHON The race begins and ends at the Sambódromo, a parade ground in downtown Rio. The 26-mile course will wind through some of the city's most historic, scenic districts. Here's hoping the runners won't be so focused on maintaining their pace that they can't enjoy the scenery.

1:15 P.M. BOXING The first medals will be awarded in the ring. Check out Paddy Barnes in the light flyweight (108-pound) class. The Ireland native knows a little about determination. He lost his first 15 fights, but now he's got a pair of bronze medals. He'll attempt to add a gold.

7:15 P.M. TRACK AND FIELD Usain Bolt *(below)* will try to continue his dominance in the 100 meters and strike his famous victory pose (one that looks suspiciously like the three-point celebration used by Wesley Matthews of the Dallas Mavericks). Nothing can slow Bolt down, not even junk food. He revealed recently that during the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, he ate 1,000 chicken McNuggets a day — and still won gold.



WILL USAIN BOLT WIN THE GOLD MEDAL IN THE 100 METERS AGAIN?

☐ YES ☐ NO

DAY 10
MONDAY AUGUST 15

8:00 A.M. MARATHON SWIMMING Haley Anderson won silver in the 2012 Olympics for the U.S., but she won't be satisfied with anything less than gold this time. And she's extra careful about what color she paints her nails: She won silver with silver polish in '12.

1:00 P.M. GYMANSTICS: MEN'S AND WOMEN'S APPARATUS In addition to team and all-around competitions, gymnasts also vie for medals in individual events. (Being a gymnast is a busy life.) Keep an eye on Jacob Dalton *(below)*. He took first in the vault at the 2016 national championship.

6:00 P.M. BASKETBALL: SPAIN VS. ARGENTINA Marc Gasol of the Memphis Grizzlies will miss the Olympics due to injury, but his big brother, Pau, will be ready to go for Spain. Will he, Ricky Rubio, and Nikola Mirotic be able to overcome the absences of Gasol and Serge Ibaka, who is sitting out the Games? Will Mirotic finally trim his beard? Tune in and see. This should be one of the best games of the group stage. Spain won silver in 2012 and Argentina was fourth.

DAY 11
TUESDAY AUGUST 16

1:00 P.M. TRACK AND FIELD Excitement is just a hop, skip, and a jump away. Literally. The triple jump — also known as the hop, skip, and jump — is one of the most interesting track events to watch. Christian Taylor of the U.S. won gold in London four years ago and also captured the crown at the most recent world championships.

3:00 P.M. BEACH VOLLEYBALL: SEMIFINALS The U.S. and Brazil will likely feature in both the men's and women's competitions. The biggest question facing the U.S. is how will Kerri Walsh Jennings do without her longtime partner, Misty May-Treanor, who retired after the pair won their third gold medal, in 2012. Walsh's new partner is no slouch. April Ross *(below right, with Jennings)* won silver in '12.

7:15 P.M. TRACK AND FIELD How's this for an awesome story? Aries Merritt of the U.S. won bronze in the 110-meter hurdles with just 20% kidney function in the 2015 World Games in Beijing. Now he is looking to show the world what he can do when healthy.

WILL KERRY WALSH JENNINGS WIN HER FOURTH STRAIGHT BEACH VOLLEYBALL GOLD ALONGSIDE NEW PARTNER APRIL ROSS?

☐ YES ☐ NO

DAY 12
WEDNESDAY AUGUST 17

12:00 P.M. SAILING We've all raced boats in the bathtub. Well, the stakes are a little higher here for U.S. teammates Annie Haeger and Briana Provancha. The pair *(above)*, who attended Boston College together, will try to bring home gold in the 470 class.

1:00 P.M. WOMEN'S BOXING This will be only the second time that women have fought in the Olympics. Middleweight Claressa Shields won gold in 2012. The heavy hitter from Flint, Michigan, is a good bet to keep her Olympic record perfect.

7:20 P.M. TRACK AND FIELD The winner of the decathlon is considered the best all-around athlete in the world. The two-day, 10-event competition kicks off today. The man to catch is 2012 winner Ashton Eaton of the U.S., who also holds the world record.

6:30 P.M. TABLE TENNIS: MEN'S TEAM FINALS Talk about an underrated sport. The ball looks like it's traveling at warp speed; watching the athletes catch up to it is incredible. Expect China to dominate. Their players have won 47 medals. The only other country in double digits is South Korea, with 18.

FROM LEFT: MICHAEL STEELE/GETTY IMAGES; HARRY HOW/GETTY IMAGES; ALEXANDRE SCHNEIDER/GETTY IMAGES FOR FIVB; MATTHEW STOCKMAN/GETTY IMAGES

DAY 13
THURSDAY AUGUST 18

3:00 P.M. WOMEN'S DIVING: PLATFORM FINAL You won't see any cannonballs here. The name of the game is to make as little splash as possible after jumping off a platform more than 30 feet above the water. So the winners tend to be tiny. How small? China's Chen Ruolin, the gold medalist in 2008 and '12, weighs just 104 pounds.

5:35 P.M. TRACK AND FIELD After Usain Bolt dusted Justin Gatlin of the U.S. in the 200 meters at the 2015 World Championships, the 34-year-old Gatlin talked about how his body was slowing down. This could be his last chance to take down the 29-year-old Bolt at the Olympics. But while most people think of Bolt as the 100-meter record-holder, he's been specializing in the 200-meter since he was 15 years old. Gatlin might need a miracle.

11:00 P.M. BEACH VOLLEYBALL: MEN'S FINAL Bruno Schmidt *(below)* and Alison Cerutti are the reigning world champs. They're going to be awfully difficult to unseat playing at home. The top U.S. team is Nick Lucena and Phil Dalhausser, who reunited recently after breaking up their partnership back in 2006.

DAY 14
FRIDAY AUGUST 19

11:00 A.M. SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING This is one of the most visually appealing sports in the Olympics, with swimmers moving gracefully in unison. Russia will try to win a fifth consecutive gold medal in the team competition.

2:30 P.M. WOMEN'S WATER POLO: GOLD MEDAL GAME There's been quite a bit of turnover in the U.S. women's water polo team — just four returning players and nine newcomers — but the players coming back are important ones. Captain Maggie Steffens brings stability and Kami Craig has two Olympic medals. Whether Craig can add a third and help this young squad win their first will be a major storyline throughout the tournament.

4:30 P.M. WOMEN'S SOCCER: GOLD MEDAL GAME The Americans have taken gold at every Games except 2000. But one thing the team has never done is win an Olympic gold after winning a World Cup. With Carli Lloyd *(above)*, the reigning world player of the year, leading the way, history could be made.

WILL THE U.S. WOMEN'S SOCCER TEAM REPEAT AS OLYMPIC CHAMPIONS ONE YEAR AFTER WINNING THE WORLD CUP?

☐ YES ☐ NO

DAY 15
SATURDAY AUGUST 20

6:30 A.M. WOMEN'S GOLF: FINAL ROUND After being omitted from the Olympics for over a century, golf is making its return. Several top players pulled out of the competition, but you can still watch two of the top players in the world, Lexi Thompson and Stacy Lewis, represent the U.S. bright and early.

2:30 P.M. WOMEN'S BASKETBALL: GOLD MEDAL GAME The U.S. hasn't lost a game at an Olympics or a world championship since 2006, so it's a pretty safe bet that the team will be in the finals. Who the U.S. will play is a mystery, but keep an eye on Australia, which is ranked No. 2 in the world.

4:30 P.M. MEN'S SOCCER: GOLD MEDAL GAME: Look for Neymar *(below)* to drag Brazil here. After a disappointing Copa América earlier this summer, the Brazilians will be amped to flex their muscles in an international competition.

HOW MANY GOALS WILL NEYMAR SCORE FOR BRAZIL?

☐ 4 OR LESS

☐ 5 OR MORE

DAY 16
SUNDAY AUGUST 21

12:15 P.M. MEN'S VOLLEYBALL: GOLD MEDAL MATCH Brazil is No. 1 in the world and has taken silver in the last two Olympics. As for the U.S.: The No. 5 team in the world will need some luck to make it this far, but we would certainly "dig" seeing them here.

2:45 P.M. MEN'S BASKETBALL: GOLD MEDAL GAME No LeBron, no big deal. No Curry, no problem. Some high-profile players are skipping Rio, but Jimmy Butler *(below)* and his U.S. teammates should stroll to yet another gold medal.

2:45 P.M. CLOSING CEREMONY Phew! After more than two weeks, the Games finally come to a close. The athletes will enjoy one last moment in the spotlight, the Olympic flame will dim, and we'll turn our eyes to Tokyo, which will host the 2020 Games.

WHO WILL BE IN THE MEN'S BASKETBALL FINAL? CIRCLE WHO YOU THINK WILL WIN. GIVE YOURSELF ONE POINT FOR EACH CORRECT TEAM, AND ONE POINT IF YOU PREDICT THE WINNER.

_____ VS _____

TALLY YOUR SCORE

See how many answers you got right to determine what kind of medal you win!

BRONZE	SILVER	GOLD
0–5 points	6–8 points	9–12 points

FROM LEFT: ALEXANDRE SCHNEIDER/GETTY IMAGES FOR FIVB; RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES (2); ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES; ALEX FERRA/JOGOS RIO 2016/GETTY IMAGES

FELIPE DANA/AP

MASCOT MASHUP

The Rio Games have two mascots: Vinicius *(above, left)* and Tom *(right)*, who is the mascot for the Paralympics. Vinicius is a blend of all the animals of Brazil. He has the agility of a cat, the balancing skills of a monkey, and the grace of a bird. Tom is a mix of every plant found in the Brazilian forests. As for that stuff on his noggin, Tom explains on his official website: "To get myself out of any jam, I pull the craziest objects out of my head of leaves." The mascots are best friends, and they have similar missions: to spread joy and encourage everyone to strive and be determined.

Send us your mascot!

Like Vinicius and Tom, Olympic mascots tend to embody traits of the host city or nation. With that in mind, we want you to tell us what the mascot would look like if the Olympics were held in your hometown. What features from your city or state would show up in the design? Send us your drawings and a brief explanation, and we'll feature some of the best in a future issue.

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